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STRAVINSKY'S

REVOLUTIONARY SCORE - A CENTURY ON

THE RITE OF SPRING

OUR
EXPERT
CRITICS
REVIEW THE
MONTH'S
NEW
RELEASES

What *really* happened at
the infamous premiere

Conducting The Rite,
by Sir Simon Rattle
and Esa-Pekka Salonen

Which recording to own?

PLUS

How the Dunedin Consort's
St John Passion recording
brings us closer to Bach

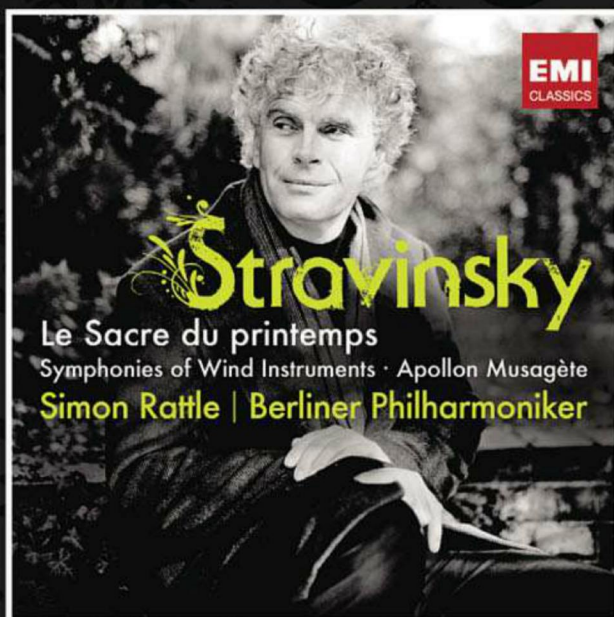


haymarket



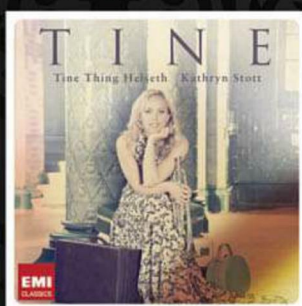
US\$9.99 CANADA \$9.99

Simon Rattle



In a year which sees the 100th anniversary of its milestone premiere, EMI Classics releases an exciting new recording of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, by Sir Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Also on the disc are new recordings of Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* and *Apollon Musagète*, another of the Russian master's ballets and one of his most serene.

Other titles to look out for...



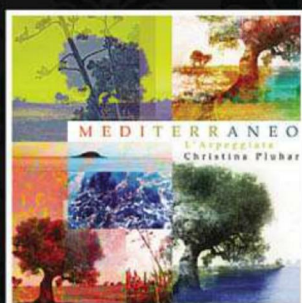
Tine Thing Helseth

Her first two albums for EMI Classics were critically acclaimed, with Gramophone praising her 'soulful approach to phrasing, quite astonishingly outstanding intonation and open and honest sound'. Now Tine Thing Helseth presents a personal choice of transcribed songs and original works which reveal the trumpet's lyric voice and take us on a colourful journey from Scandinavia to Spain.



Home of Opera

EMI Classics' latest instalment of treasures from the world's greatest collection of recorded opera features three Italian opera classics starring Montserrat Caballé (Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* and *Turandot*, as well as Bellini's *I Puritani*) who will celebrate her 80th birthday in April 2013. This batch also contains Bizet's *Carmen* recording starring Angela Gheorghiu & Roberto Alagna plus Werther featuring the same 'dream team'. Also represented in her anniversary year is 'La Divina' Maria Callas as Lucia Di Lammermoor and the batch includes many other great names such as Plácido Domingo, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Thomas Hampson, José Carreras and Violeta Urmana.



Christina Pluhar

Christina Pluhar invites you on a journey that will take you from Portugal to Turkey, following the coasts of Spain, Catalonia, Greece, and Italy. Featuring the soloists Misia, Nuria Rial, Vincenzo Capezzuto, Raquel Andueza and Katerina Papadopoulou this captivating recording is a rich dialogue between traditional plucked instruments of the Mediterranean region – the qanun, saz, Greek lyre and lavta, the oud and Portuguese guitar and the Baroque strings of l'Arpeggiata. Join Christina Pluhar on this odyssey, filled with sunshine and poetry!



Inspiration Series

Inspiration welcomes in the New Year with a programme full of variety! Dvořák's *Waldesruh* gives its name to an album of Romantic orchestral music, adagios from the Beethoven concertos arouse grand emotions, and Wagner's warlike *Ride of the Valkyries* and other opera preludes offer cinema for the ears. *Rhapsody in Blue* carries us away to Broadway with effervescent symphonic works by Gershwin, while one of the most important musicians of the entire 20th century is presented in a portrait of Yehudi Menuhin. Be inspired!

Sounds of America

Gramophone's guide to the classical scene in the US and Canada



Reviews Amid much contemporary music, even Colonna is dragged into the present » **The Scene** Live highlights – page VII

Ash

The Golden Ticket

Benjamin P Wenzelberg *treb* Charlie
Daniel Okulitch *bass-bar* Willy Wonka
Kristin Clayton *sop* Grandma Georgina/Mrs Gloop
Jamie Barton *mez* Grandma Josephine/Mrs Teavee
Keith Jameson *ten* Grandpa Joe
Jason Hardy *bass* Grandpa George/Mr Beauregard
Gerald Thompson *countertenor* Mike Teavee
Krista Costin *mez* Candy Mallow/Squirrelmistress
Abigail Nims *mez* Veruca Salt
David Kravitz *bar* Lord Salt
Ashley Emerson *sop* Violet Beauregard
Andrew Drost *ten* Augustus Gloop
Atlanta Opera Chorus and Orchestra / Peter Ash
Albany ② TROY1381/2 (118' • DDD)
Recorded live, March 2012



Ash and Sturrock's Roald Dahl opera recorded live in Atlanta

More than a few works by the British novelist Roald Dahl have provided bountiful fodder for stage and screen adaptations. They include two film versions of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and a forthcoming West End musical based on the same source starring Douglas Hodge as the eccentric candy maker Willy Wonka.

Charlie and company can also be found at the centre of an enchanting opera, *The Golden Ticket*, an American Lyric Theater commission that's been performed by both Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and Atlanta Opera. The 2012 Atlanta incarnation is captured live on this delightful set featuring a sweet-toned youngster, Benjamin P Wenzelberg, as Charlie and the superb bass-baritone Daniel Okulitch as Willy.

In their adroit transformation of Dahl's book, composer Peter Ash and librettist Donald Sturrock have reduced, caramelised and transformed the tale of a good boy realising his dream into an uproarious and endearing operatic adventure. Ash's score brims with tuneful and contemporary ingredients, as well as deft nods to Wagner, Britten, Bernstein and others.

The American-born composer has enormous fun with the grandparents, who at one point perform a snoring chorus, and ties things together towards the end with a jaunty *Falstaff*-like fugue. The only youthful character sung by an actual child is Charlie. The remaining urchins, all naughty, are cheekily assigned to adults according to voice type

GRAMOPHONE *talks to...*

Peter Ash

The composer on his new opera, *The Golden Ticket*

Why did you see Charlie and the Chocolate Factory working as an opera rather than a musical?

I read the book as a child, I've worked with the Roald Dahl Estate and conducted lots of commissions, so I knew what was already out there. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is one of the great modern myths and bears lots of different treatments. What we've done is just another treatment of it. But to me, opera is the greatest art form. Some people have said this is a musical but what makes it an opera to me is that it celebrates the prodigious qualities of the human voice.

How did you define the characters?

It was a gift, the way it all fell into place. Charlie is the only 'real' person in the piece, so he had to be played by a real child. Violet Beauregard had to be a gum-chewing coloratura soprano and Veruca Salt – my favourite character – had to be a sassy mezzo. Mike Teavee is a slightly underdeveloped, video-game-obsessed,



stuttering Baroque countertenor and Augustus Gloop is the stereotypical fat tenor.

How did you characterise Charlie?

The drawback in having a child play the part is that I was against amplifying anyone, but we had to amplify Benjamin [P Wenzelberg] moderately, and it worked. The problem with Charlie as a character is that, when you read the book, you become Charlie – just as when you read *Matilda*, you become Matilda – but the danger is that, on stage, he becomes, in Roald Dahl's words, 'a boring little bugger'. I wanted to humanise him but not make him sentimental. He has one set piece, an aria over the top of his grandparents' 'snoring quartet'; and, unlike the other characters, he doesn't sing about what he wants but instead wonders what his grandparents are feeling. He has his own interior world and in this way he becomes more human.

(coloratura soprano, tenor, countertenor, mezzo), providing telling contrasts of personality.

The Atlanta performance does a dandy job of accentuating the opera's strengths, though seeing the production via DVD likely would reveal even more. The cast is uniformly excellent and the orchestra of two dozen players brings vivacious detailing and colour to the score under the composer's incisive baton. Just how well the work functions can be discerned by the reactions of the audience, who guffaw at the clever wordplay and devour every morsel of this affecting operatic candy. **Donald Rosenberg**

JS Bach

The Art of Fugue, BWV1080

Andrew Rangell *pf*

Steinway & Sons ③ 30012 (74' • DDD)

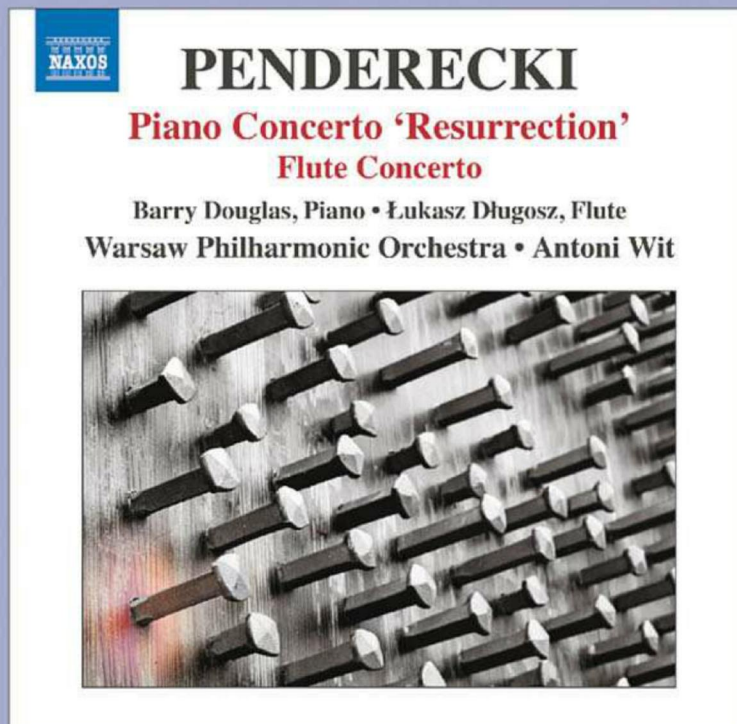


Rangell resumes his Bach voyage with the unfinished BWV1080

Bach's *Die Kunst der Fuge*, BWV1080, remains among the most prodigious models of composition in the entire history of music. But if, intellectually speaking, it looms like some formidable mountain peak and if, as Andrew Rangell puts it in his memorable accompanying essay, 'the language is austere, the tone serious', its chief wonder is surely its capacity 'to blend instruction with delight'. Scholarly achievement and imaginative volition combine in music that is as moving as it is daunting. More pragmatically, *Die Kunst der Fuge* consists of 14 fugues and four canons deriving from the opening fugue, all encompassed within the single key of D minor.

Penderecki

Scored for a large orchestra, including triple wind and a raft of percussion, Naxos presents Penderecki's Piano Concerto, heard here in its 2007 revision first performed by Barry Douglas. This recording renews the composer's direct involvement with the 'grand' concerto tradition that culminated in Rachmaninov and Prokofiev. Its subtitle 'Resurrection' refers to the melody based on a chorale of a non-religious character, which gradually make its way into the foreground before emerging with striking power at the work's climax.

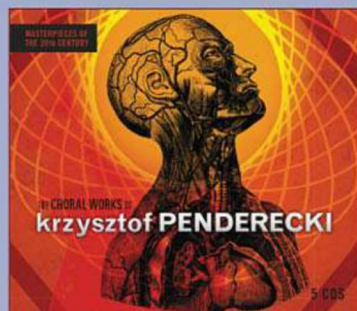


8572696 • 747313269679

"...essential addition to any Penderecki collection." - **Audiophile Audition** ★★★★★

Conductor Antoni Wit and producers Aleksandra Nagórko and Andrzej Sasin were nominated for their work on a recording of six orchestral works of Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki which covers almost 50 years of the composer's extensive oeuvre.

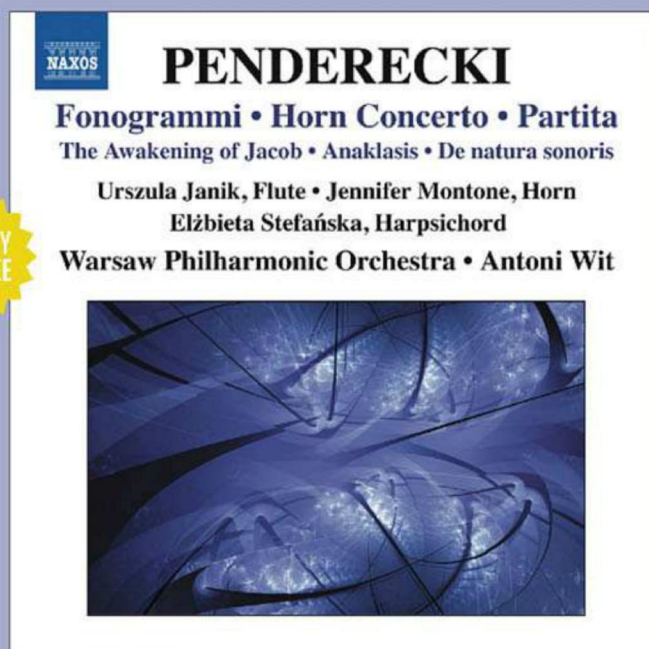
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GRAMMY
NOMINEE



Hauling the 17th century into the 21st: the Houston Chamber Choir performing Colonna's *Psalmi ad Vesperas* in 2011

Yet while this suggests a tremendous degree of concentration, increasingly I find myself struck by Bach's sheer audacity. For here, as Rangell again puts it, is Bach 'alone with his genius', happily indifferent to accusations of obscurity and intent only in the vast meditation of his final major instrumental composition on the summa of his art, though one that is incomplete, ending in an abrupt and poignant silence.

Praise for Rangell's dedication and total immersion in his task could hardly be high enough: inseparable intellectual and virtuoso demands are met with unfaltering clarity and expressive beauty. This music, here finely recorded, for many (notably Glenn Gould) represents the sublimity of the contrapuntal art, of voices entwined in endless debate presented with unflinching lucidity. **Bryce Morrison**

Colonna

Psalmi ad Vesperas, Op 12

Melissa Givens, **Kelli Shircliffe** *sops* **Ryland Angel**

countertenor **Eduardo Tercero** *ten* **Matthew Treviño** *bass*

Houston Chamber Choir and Orchestra / **Robert Simpson**

MSR Classics © MS1437 (78' • DDD)



Houston choir follow Russian anthology with Baroque music

Comparing these sacred works by the little-known 17th-century composer Giovanni Paolo Colonna

(1637-95) with the Houston choir's previous collection, an anthology of little-known secular works by 19th-century Russian masters, one might think that the only thread connecting the two repertoires is their obscurity. But without downplaying the overall sense of discovery simply in hearing these works (even the specialists who do know Colonna by name generally think of him more as an organist and organ builder), there are other threads apparent just beneath the surface. Disregarding the obvious differences in eras and cultures, both collections share an overriding sense of musicality, employing all the tools at a composer's disposal regardless of the music's intent. Much of Colonna's word-painting and vocal ornamentation, for example, would hardly have been out of place in a Venetian opera house.

Granted, conductor Robert Simpson's approach to Colonna seems particularly suited to making that case. This is not a recording for early music fetishists. Authenticity, whether in tuning or actual vocalism, is clearly not on the agenda, and the packaging plainly credits the editor and publisher of the modern edition.

Nor do the results seem particularly forced. The music calls for a tonal (rather than modal) approach, and while the 14-piece orchestra conveys the spirit of Baroque performance style, the recording quality recreates the acoustic of Houston's Church of St John the Divine rather than a Bolognese cathedral.

The goal, in other words, is to haul Colonna into our world, not to look back at his. **Ken Smith**

Mahler

Das Lied von der Erde

(chamber version, arr Schoenberg-Riehn)

Jennifer Johnson Cano *mez* **Paul Groves** *ten*

St Luke's Chamber Ensemble / **George Manahan**

St Luke's Collection © SLC3011 (66' • DDD)

Recorded live 2011



Chamber version of Mahler songs from New York-based St Luke's

In a tidy confluence of anniversaries, the St Luke's Chamber Ensemble's 2011 performance of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* honouring the centenary of the piece's premiere has now been released on the orchestra's own label, now in its 10th year. This recording of the chamber version (initiated by Schoenberg and completed by Rainer Riehn) would once have filled a wide gap, but now (since 2011) fills a rather smaller gap between the chamber purity of the Manchester Camerata and the sonic firepower of its fellow British ensemble, the Orchestra of the Swan.

George Manahan, a veteran conductor of both voices and 20th-century music, is expertly positioned for this piece, fitting Mahler's inherent lyricism to an instrumental transparency straddling

VIRGINIA ARTS FESTIVAL

SPRING 2013

Chamber Music Series



ANDRÉ-MICHEL SCHUB,
Chamber Music Director



MIAMI STRING QUARTET

Jocelyn Adelman, *violin*
Mike Daniels, *cello*
Debra Wendells Cross, *flute*
Barbara Chapman, *harp*
Lydia Artymiw, *piano*
Josu de Solaun, *piano*
Amanda Halstead, *piano*
Anna Petrova, *piano*
Charles Woodward, *piano*
Christopher Houlihan, *organ*
JoAnn Falletta, *guitar*
Andrew York, *guitar*

**TURTLE ISLAND
STRING QUARTET**
with Tierney Sutton

Baroque Celebration



REBEL



BACH B-MINOR MASS

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Yale Schola Cantorum
Yale Baroque Ensemble
Masaaki Suzuki, *conductor*

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MEOW, MEOW *Cabaret Superstar*

PRESERVATION HALL JAZZ BAND

Dance Series



BIRMINGHAM ROYAL BALLET
Coppélia

Virginia Symphony Orchestra



RICHMOND BALLET
The Rite of Spring:
100th Anniversary

Virginia Symphony Orchestra
JoAnn Falletta, *conductor*

TODD ROSENLIB DANCE *Stravinsky's Les Noces*

Virginia Arts Festival
Chamber Musicians

Virginia Symphony Chorus
JoAnn Falletta, *conductor*

Virginia International Tattoo





the late Romantic and modern eras. His musical forces also are responsive to those demands, though it sometimes takes them a while to get going.

Judging by the results here, tenor Paul Groves is not naturally prone to undisciplined exuberance, nor is mezzo Jennifer Johnson Cano normally so introspective – traits that frequently run through their respective texts. Both rely on vocal power rather than precision (they're opera singers rather than recitalists), and by those standards they succeed.

Their efforts, though, are often undercut by the recording quality. Although the sound captures the energy of a live performance, it also enhances its flaws. Why, for example, is Groves – a tenor of heroic proportions – entirely overpowered in his initial entrance by a mere handful of instruments? The ear boggles. **Ken Smith**

Selected comparisons:

Irwin, Wedd, Manchester Camerata, Boyd

(10/11) (AVTE) AV2195

Curtis, Guillory, Orch of the Swan, Woods

(10/11) (SOMM) SOMMCD0109

Rohde

'One: Chamber Music of Kurt Rohde'

Violin Concertino^a. One^b. Double Trouble^c.

Four Remixes^d

^aAxel Strauss *vn* ^cKurt Rohde, ^eEllen Ruth Rose *vas*

^bGenevieve Feiwen Lee *pf/spkr*

^{ad}Left Coast Chamber Ensemble / ^aMatilda Hofman;

^cEmpyrean Ensemble / Mary Chun

Innova © INNOVA839 (76' • DDD)



San Francisco-based composer joins in playing his own music

Accompanied by booklet-notes that cover Kurt Rohde's music from every conceivable angle and include especially ponderous aesthetic statements such as 'to create force-fields of memory and feeling...that tell us what it feels like to be a person today', this CD from Innova introduces this composer (based at the University of California, Davis) with a variety of 15- to 20-minute musical entities that follow no identifiable musical stream but can leave no listener undisturbed.

Instead, each piece, as the notes imply, follows its own uniquely arresting course with determined intensity and a concentrated use of resources. Nothing seems to happen casually, so the influences that permeate Rohde's music – from the Baroque to (in the inconclusive *Four Remixes*) the Beatles, Elton John and Joni Mitchell – become indivisible parts of a dynamic, energetic, occasionally noisy and sometimes turgid flow. It's what you might expect from a young composer faced with the 21st century's overwhelming backlog of musical influences. The fact that the performers play as if they'd been an intimate

part of the compositional process produces gripping results.

The Violin Concertino, with its use of traditional tune types and rhetoric, is the most immediately accessible music on the disc. Its slow, haunting middle movement makes the perfect bridge between the outer movements' virtuoso displays for 1998 Naumburg Award-winner Axel Strauss. The title-track, a setting of Jakob Stein's poems about Judaism and (perhaps) existential reality, features Genevieve Feiwen Lee as pianist and speaker in an ambitious but ultimately self-indulgent *Alice in Wonderland*-type adventure. **Laurence Vittes**

'Concerti for Piano with Percussion Orchestra'

Gillingham Concerto for Piano and Percussion

Orchestra Mobley [Pleez], [Plez], /Pliz/

Noon Piano Concerto No 3, Op 232 Santos Moppets

Ji Hyun Kim *pf* McCormick Percussion Group /

Robert McCormick

Ravello © RR7862 (60' • DDD)



McCormicks play Gillingham, Mobley, Noon and Santos

For their fifth Ravello release, the McCormick Percussion Group, whose leader Robert McCormick was a member of the Harry Partch Ensemble and principal percussionist of the Florida Orchestra for 20 years, present two eight-minute-long *tours de force* as the prelude to the two three-movement concertos.

Throughout, the composers use percussion as a conventional partnering orchestra that just happens to take a Partch-like delight in sound; David Noon's Piano Concerto No 3 is particularly adventurous in this regard, using eight percussionists playing 84 instruments. Also throughout are conventional harmonies and structures, meaning that any orchestra with the courage to programme this genre would find a very happy audience. Equally consistent is the soloist's role, which Ji Hyun Kim handles with industry and, when the music allows, both spellbinding virtuosity and limpid eloquence.

The more conventional of the two concertos is David Gillingham's Concerto for Piano and Percussion Orchestra, commissioned by a consortium of universities in Pennsylvania and North Carolina and a high school in Ohio. The music abounds with influences ranging from Saint-Saëns (think the 'Aquarium' section from *Carnival of the Animals*) to Satie, unified by neo-romantic waves of sound that, at times, suggest Rachmaninov. By contrast, Noon's 30-minute concerto constantly surprises with unpredictable turns, such as hints of the timpani solo in Britten's *Young Person's Guide*; it is also rich in brooding, rhapsodic emotion and ends with a brilliant last movement that

confounds listeners one last time – with a whimper before the final bang.

The artistically designed booklet-notes give a minimum of details about the music. The crisp, large-scale recording will delight any audiophile. **Laurence Vittes**

'Dimensions'

'Works for String Orchestra'

Babin Couleurs^a. La suite du promeneur^a

R Burns Revolutions^a Burwasser Flux^b

Debussy Préludes - La fille aux cheveux de lin

(arr Stoltzman)^c Hutter Deploration^d

Kronfuss River of Time^e March Sanguis venenatus^a

^eGabriela Kummerová *cor ang* ^cRichard Stoltzman *cl*

^{ae}Moravian Philharmonic Strings / Petr Vronský;

^bConcordia Orchestra / Marin Alsop;

^cSlovak Radio Symphony Orchestra / Kirk Trevor;

^dCzech Philharmonic Orchestra / Robert Ian Winstin

Navona © NV5895 (52' • DDD)



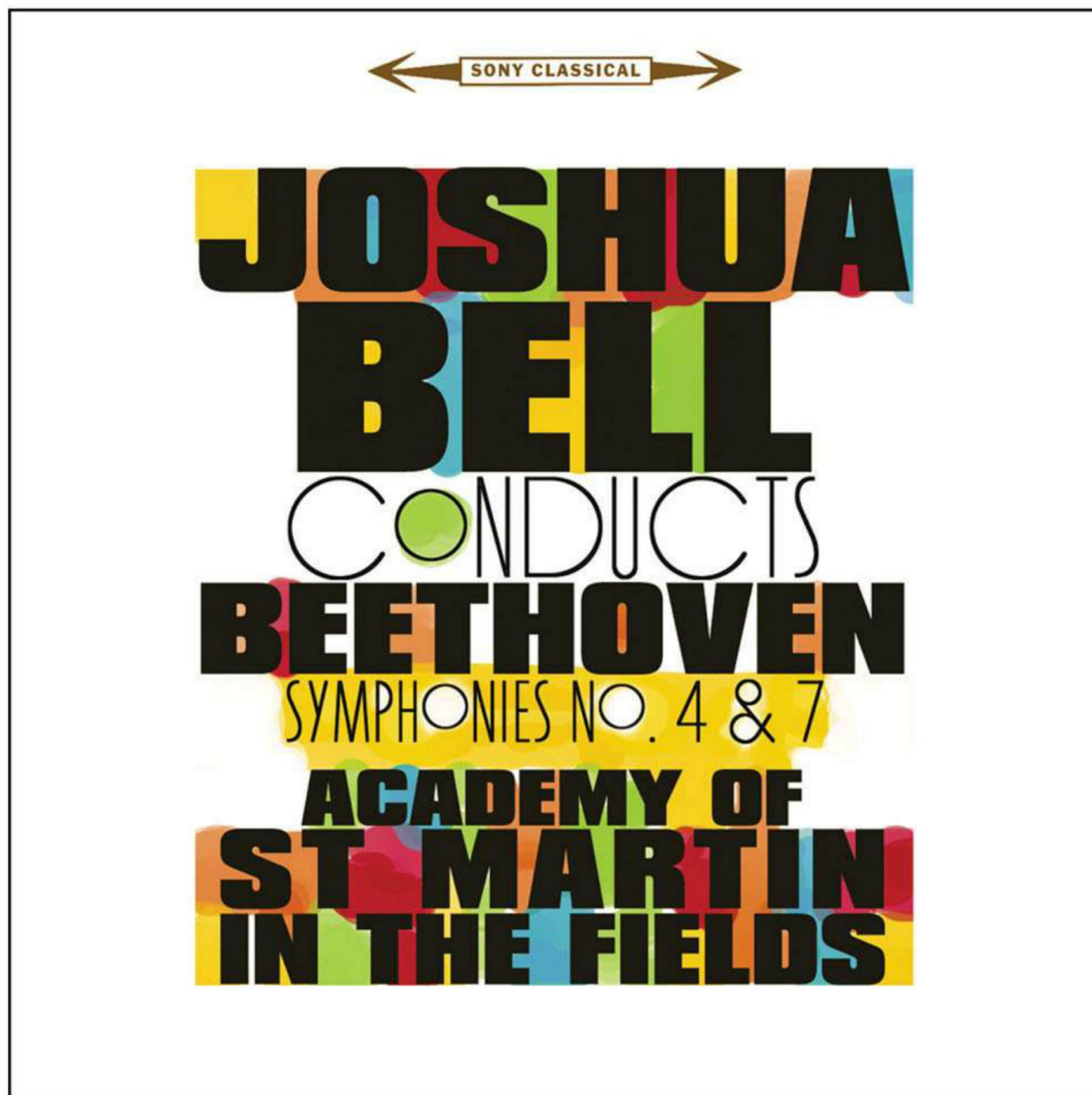
Eight works for strings from four different orchestras

The booklet-notes for 'Dimensions: Works for String Orchestra' refer to the music of the disc's seven composers as capturing 'the fluidity of time and emotion, and [illustrating] the impact of past experiences on the present and future'. Whether these pieces actually reflect such misty imagery is up to each listener to decide. The music tends towards the conflicted and the impassioned, with only short bursts of mirth breaking through the darkness.

Two scores by Louis Babin reveal a penchant for varied atmospheres and haunting gestures. *Couleurs* is built on urgent changes of rhythm and string sonority, while *La suite du promeneur* comprises five miniatures of waltzing ardour. The chromaticism in Gregory Hutter's warm *Deploration* has roots in Mahlerian angst. Slow, aching lines and mild dissonances also inhabit Andrew March's intensely felt *Sanguis venenatus*. Wind instruments join the strings in Debussy's familiar *Girl with the Flaxen Hair* (arranged by the soloist, clarinetist Richard Stoltzman) and Rudy Kronfuss's poetic *River of Time* (the solo line was apparently intended for English horn, which sounds more like a brass instrument). Reynard Burns's *Revolutions* delivers on its swirling title with myriad waltz figures. The most mercurial work is Daniel Burwasser's *Flux*, which moves from effusive romanticism and playfulness to tenderness and mysticism.

The repertoire's grab-bag nature is mirrored in the performing forces – no fewer than four orchestras under four conductors. The editing could be better: some pieces fade abruptly away, others end with sounds of musicians waiting for the mikes to be turned off. But the playing is altogether elegant and involved. **Donald Rosenberg**

Joshua Bell's Debut Album as Music Director of Academy of St. Martin in the Fields



"This was as superb a Beethoven Fourth as I've heard, delivered by a conductor of tremendous promise and genuine ideas – who also happens to be one heck of a violinist."
– *The Washington Post*



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THE SCENE

This year's Easter month features a fair bit of Bach, both instrumental and vocal, as well as Renée Fleming in a part written specially for her, some piano from the dazzling Yuja Wang and an all-American mix

NEW YORK

New York Philharmonic

The Bach Variations: A Philharmonic Festival (March 6 – April 6)

This month-long celebration of Bach continues into April, with a highlight being Bach's consummate masterpiece the Mass in B minor. Alan Gilbert leads the Philharmonic in performances featuring stellar soloists Dorothea Röschmann (soprano), Anne Sofie von Otter (mezzo), Steve Davislim (tenor) and Eric Owens (bass-baritone), joined by the New York Choral Artists. Later in the festival, the Philharmonic presents Bach's violin concertos (with Isabelle Faust); principal cellist Carter Brey plays the complete Bach Cello Suites; and pianist András Schiff leads the orchestra in Bach, Mendelssohn and Schumann.

nyphil.org

LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra

Mostly Baroque (March 23 & 24)

The Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, led by Jeffrey Kahane, offer a thoughtful programme culminating in two significant Baroque pieces – Bach's *Brandenburg* Concerto No 5 in D (one of the earliest concertos to feature a keyboard solo) and selections from Handel's *Water Music*. But before arriving in the 18th century, we hear Stravinsky's neo-classical *Concerto in E flat, Dumbarton Oaks*, one of the composer's two chamber concertos. This is followed by Mozart's sublime *Serenade No 10 in B flat (Gran Partita)*.

laco.org

ST LOUIS

St Louis Symphony Orchestra

Copland and Bernstein (March 23 & 24)

Billed as an all-American concert, this mixes certifiable hits with lesser-known repertoire. Copland's music bookends the programme, which opens with the noirish *Quiet City* and closes with selections from the ballet *Rodeo* (featuring the famous 'Hoe Down'). Copland influenced many musicians, including Leonard Bernstein, whose *Serenade* – essentially a five-movement concerto with a prominent violin line – is here performed by concertmaster David Halen. A more recent composition by Christopher Rouse, the emotive and

EVENT OF THE MONTH



Nézet-Séguin: placing vocal music at the heart of programming

PHILADELPHIA

Philadelphia Orchestra

Bach: St Matthew Passion (March 28-30)

Since taking over as music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra earlier this season, Yannick Nézet-Séguin has placed vocal music at the heart of his programming. Bach's *Passion* is a case in point. The maestro reintroduces this sacred oratorio to the orchestra after 30 years, with performances over the Easter weekend. It promises to be an epic event featuring children's choir, double choir and double orchestra as well as solo voices including bass-baritone Luca Pisaroni as Jesus.

philorch.org

accessible *Flute Concerto*, is played by principal flute Mark Sparks.

stlsymphony.org

LOS ANGELES

Walt Disney Concert Hall

Yuja Wang debut recital (March 24)

Expect nothing less than dazzling virtuosity with Yuja Wang. She's previously thrilled audiences here with exhilarating concerto performances, but now, at the age of 26, this Chinese-born pianist arrives to play a solo show. Her repertoire is suitably ambitious, with a heavy dose of Rachmaninov: the *Elégie* in E flat minor, the *Presto* in E minor (No 4 from *Moment musicaux*) and the epic *Piano Sonata No 2*. The programme also promises Scriabin, Debussy, Schoenberg and Schumann as well as pieces that showcase prodigious technique – Ravel's *La valse* and Lemare's transcription of the *Scherzo* from Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which never fails to impress.

laphil.com

CHICAGO

Lyric Opera of Chicago

Renée Fleming in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (March 26 & 29; April 3 & 6)

Soprano Renée Fleming reprises her starring role as Blanche DuBois in four semi-staged performances of André Previn's operatic take

on the classic Tennessee Williams play. Since *Streetcar* premiered at the San Francisco Opera in 1998, the work has been performed around the world. But here's a chance to experience Fleming in the part, specifically written for her voice. An all-star cast joins Fleming: Susanna Phillips as Stella, Teddy Tahu Rhodes as Stanley and Anthony Dean Griffey as Mitch. (The same singers perform the opera at Carnegie Hall on March 14).

lyricopera.org

DALLAS

Dallas Opera

Puccini: *Turandot* (April 5, 7, 10, 13, 19 & 21) /

Argento: *The Aspern Papers* (April 12, 14, 17, 20 & 28)

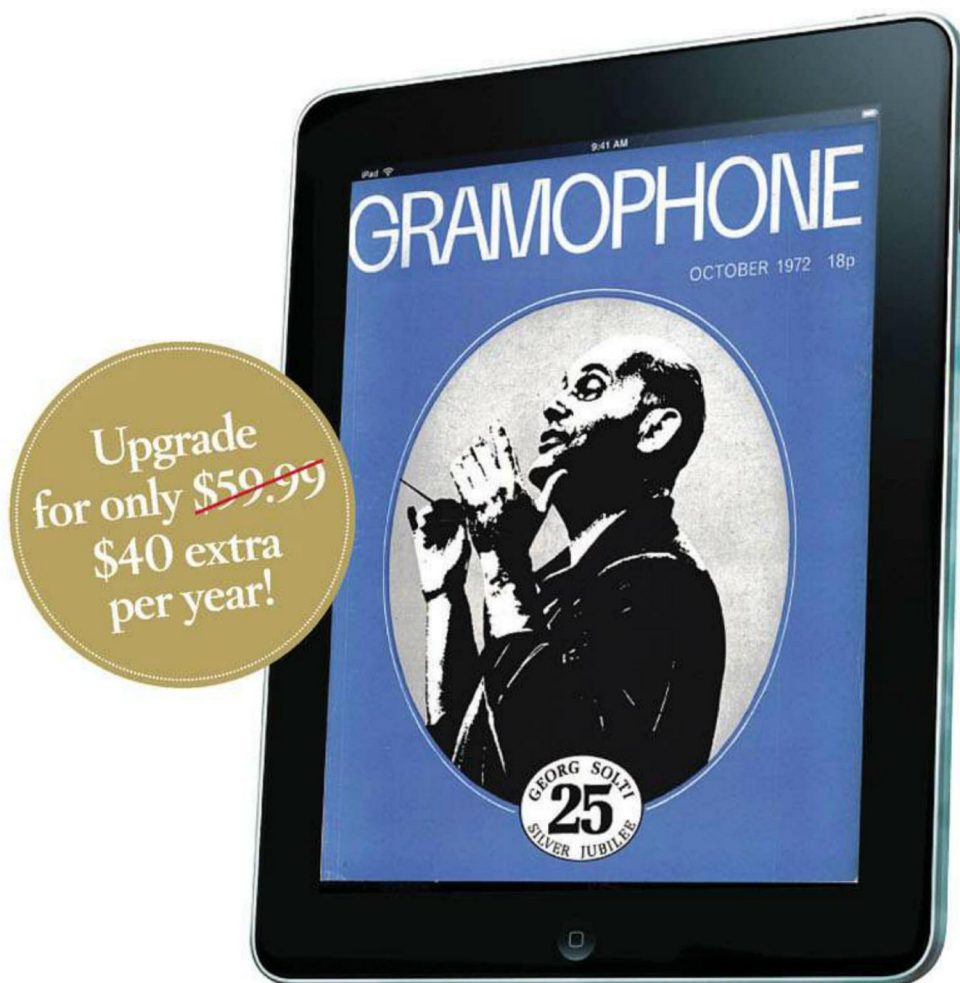
Dallas Opera brings back Puccini's beloved *Turandot* after a decade, with an impressive line-up – soprano Lise Lindstrom (as Princess Turandot), tenor Antonello Palombi (as Prince Calaf) and soprano Hei-Kyung Hong (as Liù). Mid-April, the company presents a new production of Dominick Argento's *The Aspern Papers* to celebrate 25 years since its 1988 world premiere at Dallas Opera. The new production stars mezzo Susan Graham, soprano Alexandra Deshorties, tenor Joseph Kaiser and baritone Nathan Gunn.

dallasopera.org

Previews by Damian Fowler

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EDITORIAL

Phone 020 8267 5136 Fax 020 8267 5844
email gramophone@haymarket.com

EDITOR

Martin Cullingford

DEPUTY EDITOR

Sarah Kirkup / 020 8267 5829

REVIEWS EDITOR

Andrew Mellor / 020 8267 5125

FEATURES EDITOR

James McCarthy / 020 8267 5954

PRODUCTION EDITOR

Antony Craig / 020 8267 5874

NEWS EDITOR

Charlotte Smith / 020 8267 5155

SUB-EDITOR

David Thresher / 020 8267 5135

ART EDITOR

Lynsey Row / 020 8267 5091

AUDIO EDITOR

Andrew Everard / 020 8267 5029

PICTURE EDITOR

Sunita Sharma-Gibson / 020 8267 5861

EDITORIAL AND PUBLISHING COORDINATOR

Sue McWilliams / 020 8267 5136

GRAMOPHONE SECRETARY

Libby McPhee

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

James Jolly

THANKS TO

Hannah Nepil, Francesco Burns, Maria Le Brun and Marija Đurić Speare

ADVERTISING

Phone 020 8267 5959 Fax 020 8267 5866
email gramophone.ads@haymarket.com

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR

Ben Guyan / 020 8267 5408

SALES MANAGER

Esther Zuke / 020 8267 5959

SALES EXECUTIVE

Luke Battersby / 020 8267 5101

Walter Jennings / 020 8267 5016

CLASSIFIED SALES EXECUTIVE

Oli Galvin / 020 8267 5853

PRODUCTION CONTROLLER

Kristina Kuznesova / 020 8267 5349

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BACK ISSUES

0844 848 8823 (UK) +44 (0)1795 592980 (overseas)
gramophone@servicehelpline.co.uk
US & Canada 1-866-918-1446 haymarket@imsnews.com

PUBLISHING

Phone 020 8267 5136 Fax 020 8267 5844

PUBLISHER

Kate Law / kate.law@haymarket.com

BRAND MANAGER

Luca Da Re / 020 8267 5182

PUBLISHING EXECUTIVE

Rachel Cramond / 020 8267 5140

LICENSING DIRECTOR

Jim James / 020 8267 5110 / jim.james@haymarket.com

GROUP PRODUCTION MANAGER

Stuart White / 020 8267 5420

DIRECT MARKETING MANAGER

Lucy Staves / lucystaves@haymarket.com

SYNDICATION SALES

Roshini Sethi / 020 8267 5396

HAYMARKET CONSUMER MEDIA

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Paul Harpin

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Mark Payton

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Rachael Prasher

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'It's been very revealing to listen to many favourite recordings of early Requiem settings,' says **FABRICE FITCH**, who writes this month's Specialist Guide. 'Not least,' he continues, 'because of the salutary realisation that some of the newest offerings give them a run for their money.'



'What's not to like,' muses **DAVID VICKERS**, 'about a trip to Edinburgh to watch the Dunedin Consort working intensively on Bach's *St John Passion*? Or carrying out interviews with performers and scholars about the pros and cons of liturgical reconstructions? The penance was having to distil the results into a single article!'



'Saint-Saëns's life-affirming Second Piano Concerto has been a favourite since childhood,' says **JEREMY NICHOLAS**, who surveys the work for this month's Collection. 'I'd never have thought it could prompt so many different viewpoints – nor how many pianists and conductors are cavalier with Saint-Saëns's meticulous scoring.'



FOR THE FULL LIST OF
GRAMOPHONE REVIEWERS
TURN TO PAGE 41

GRAMOPHONE

Founded in 1923 by Sir Compton Mackenzie and Christopher Stone as 'an organ of candid opinion for the numerous possessors of gramophones'

Seeking authenticity in musical performance



Historically informed performance has, over past decades, vividly enriched our understanding of early music. And yet generally the authenticity goes only so far. For much of the music performed was meant not for concert performance – nor, indeed, the recording studio – but for worship. This is not to say a Mass setting or Passion cannot be profound when divorced from its original context: it can. But that was never the intention and something is lost. The Dunedin Consort's new recording of Bach's *St John Passion*, our Recording of the Month, helps reveal just what that is (a topic David Vickers explores further in his feature on page 34). The Passion was a communal act, 'designed to involve the listener...intensely, both as part of a congregation and individually' (as John Butt writes in the

'In cathedrals, churches and chapels, professional and amateur choirs alike regularly sing sacred music as intended – not a concert but an act of worship'

booklet-notes). Integral to the whole were hymns, intercessions and a sermon, all of which are also offered by the Dunedin Consort's release.

But while this is something relatively rare on record, it's not of course rare live. In cathedrals, churches and chapels, professional and skilled amateur choirs alike regularly sing sacred music as intended. It's not a concert, it is an act of worship (but a spiritual space welcoming of everybody), and the sole reason many of the world's leading choirs who regularly grace our pages exist. It's a living tradition, with choral commissions among the most active areas of new music; it also offers an unparalleled musical education to the next generation. Can you think of any other field where such excellence takes place day in, day out, offered (collection plate aside) for free? And yet I'm constantly surprised by how few people go to hear it. I hope you'll buy the Dunedin Consort's recording and enrich your understanding of Bach's

St John Passion. And then, if you don't already do so, attend a nearby Evensong and support (and enjoy) this most remarkable of musical traditions. Of course, I realise I'm on shaky ground writing this when our cover celebrates a work invariably taken out of context and transferred from ballet theatre to concert hall, but that's a discussion for another day...



Martin

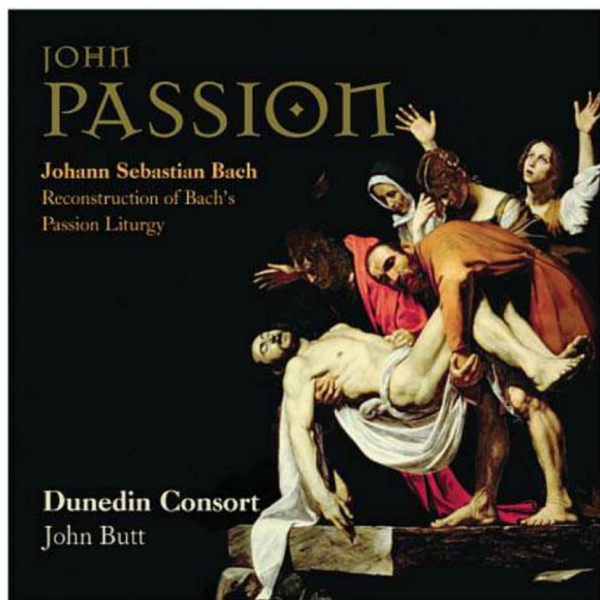
martin.cullingford@haymarket.com

March 2013

GRAMOPHONE *Choice*



Informed by our unrivalled panel of critics,
we choose the month's must-hear recordings



Recording of the Month

'Naturalness and emotional honesty are what emerge from this tight-knit and perfectly paced ensemble Passion'

► **LINDSAY KEMP'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 42**

JS BACH

St John Passion, BWV245

Matthew Brook bar Christus **Nicholas Mulroy** ten Evangelist

Joanne Lunn sop **Clare Wilkinson** contr **Robert Davies** bar

University of Glasgow Chapel Choir / James Grossmith;

Dunedin Consort / John Butt

Linn CKD419



HAYDN

Symphonies Nos 6-8

La Petite Bande /
Sigiswald Kuijken

Accent ACC24272

'From sunrise to storm, these players (seven strings, seven wind – *petite* indeed) are minutely responsive to the drama in these symphonic vignettes.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**



SAINT-SAËNS, TCHAIKOVSKY

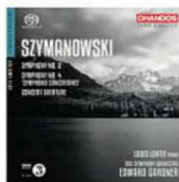
Cello Works

Stéphane Tétreault vc

Quebec Symphony
Orchestra / Fabien Gabel
Analekta AN2 9881

'The solo playing is astonishingly mature not merely in its technical attributes but also in its warmth, brilliance and subtlety of colour.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 51**



SZYMANOWSKI

Symphonies Nos 2 & 4.

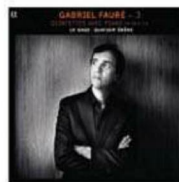
Concert Overture, Op 12

Louis Lortie pf

BBC Symphony Orchestra
/ Edward Gardner
Chandos CHSA5115

'The changing face and manner of this most fascinating and accomplished of composers is richly chronicled here.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 52**



FAURÉ

Piano Quintets –

No 1, Op 89; No 2, Op 115

Eric Le Sage pf

Ebène Quartet

Alpha ALPHA602

'Everywhere the pacing sounds utterly natural: Le Sage and the Ebène are the most persuasive guides through sometimes daunting terrain.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 59**



BRITTEN

Solo Cello Suites

Philip Higham vc

Delphian DCD34125

'There is no doubting the plain virtuosity of these works and despite his appreciation of their contextual importance, Higham still manages to revel in the glorious sound they invite the cello to make.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**



MUSSORGSKY. PROKOFIEV

Piano Works

Steven Osborne *pf*

Hyperion CDA67896

'Here is an ideal blend of fidelity to the score, with a subtle and distinctive rather than overbearing musical personality. Everything is as musicianly as it is technically immaculate.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 67**



LISZT. MAHLER

Lieder

Anne Schwanewilms *sop*

Charles Spencer *pf*

Onyx ONYX4103

'Evidence of her artistry is everywhere apparent. Her phrasing is seamless, with none of the audible words-versus-music negotiations noticeable even in fine singers.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**



SCHUBERT

Lieder

Matthias Goerne *bar*

Andreas Haefliger *pf*

Harmonia Mundi

HMC90 2141

'More than any other singer, Matthias Goerne conjures a Schubert who once allegedly said of himself, "Sometimes it seems as if I no longer belong to this world."'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**



HANDEL

Giulio Cesare in Egitto

Soloists; Il Complesso

Barocco / Alan Curtis

Naïve OP30536

'Sesto's vengeance aria "Svegliatevi nel core" is ideally spellbinding, whereas its fast sections are dogmatic enough to convey determination rather than merely superficial volatility.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**



DVD/Blu-ray

'SCHUMANN AT PIER 2'

A concert film

Deutsche

Kammerphilharmonie

Bremen / Paavo Järvi

C Major Entertainment

DVD 711908; **Blu-ray** 712004

'This is the sort of set that makes me grateful that classical recordings are still being made.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 52**



Reissue/Archive

**'SZYMON GOLDBERG:
VOL 2'**

Recordings from 1932-51

Various artists;

Szymon Goldberg *vn*

Music & Arts CD1225

'The Bach concertos are among Goldberg's finest solo recordings, distinctive above all for the great beauty of their slow movements.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**

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Reviewed this month: 11 Bach family members; 2 Purcell family members; 1 Panufnik family member

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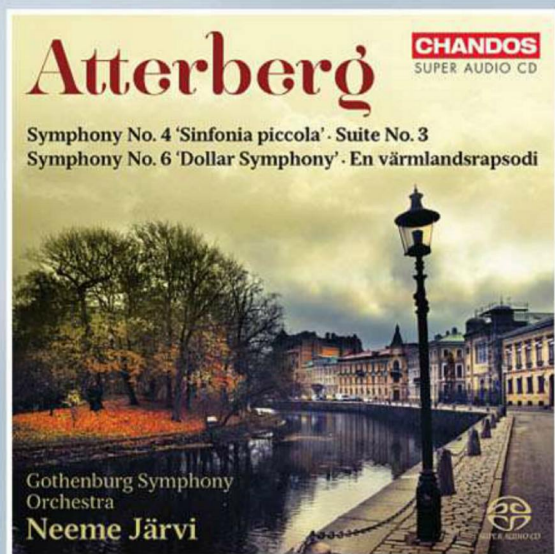
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26 Stravinsky's revolutionary *Rite* is 100 this year



34 John Butt on recording liturgical reconstructions



Disc of the Month

Atterberg Orchestral Works, Vol. 1

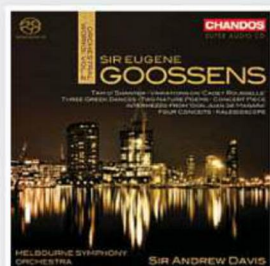
Following his surveys of orchestral works by Halvorsen and Svendsen with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, Neeme Järvi here turns to the Swedish composer Kurt Atterberg, this time with the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra. Atterberg was considered one of Sweden's leading composers in the twentieth century, his music tuneful, accessible, and charmingly folkloristic, even impressionistic, in nature.

CHSA 5116

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CHANDOS New Releases



Goossens Orchestral Works, Vol. 2

The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra under its new Chief Conductor, Sir Andrew Davis, performs a range of works by Sir Eugene Goossens. The disc includes the premiere recordings of the orchestral versions of *Four Conceits*, *Two Nature Poems*, *Three Greek Dances*, and the Intermezzo from *Don Juan de Mañara*.

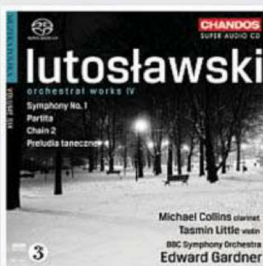
CHSA 5119



British Clarinet Sonatas Vol. 2

'Collins's clarinet-playing mesmerises the ear', wrote *BBC Music* of Vol. 1 in our ongoing survey of British clarinet sonatas. On this disc, Michael Collins and Michael McHale turn to Arthur Benjamin's *Le Tombeau de Ravel*, Edward Gregson's *Tributes*, Sonatinas by Joseph Horowitz and Sir Malcolm Arnold, and the Sonata by Arnold Cooke.

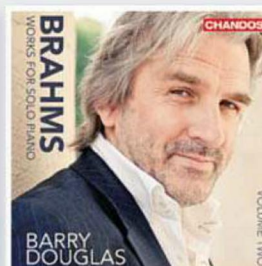
CHAN 10758



Lutosławski Orchestral Work, Vol. 4

We have reached the final volume of symphonies in the series of orchestral and choral works by the Polish composer Witold Lutosławski. The BBC Symphony Orchestra and Edward Gardner perform Symphony No. 1, as well as Partita and *Chain 2* with Tasmin Little the violin soloist, and the folk tune-inspired *Danse Preludes* with Michael Collins on clarinet.

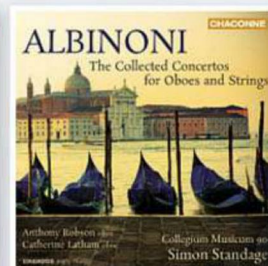
CHSA 5108



Brahms Works for Solo Piano, Vol. 2

This is Volume 2 in Barry Douglas's ongoing survey of the works for solo piano by Johannes Brahms. *BBC Music* wrote of Vol. 1: '[his] approach is straightforward and eschews any temptation towards novelty for the sake of it... he goes for the music's emotional jugular enhanced by beautiful rich tone and structural vigour.'

CHAN 10757



Albinoni Concertos for Strings and Oboes

During the 1990s, Collegium Musicum 90 and Simon Standage released several volumes of Albinoni concertos, which proved popular with critics and public alike. In this re-issue the concertos – for single oboe, double oboe, and strings – are presented in opus number order, showing the contrasting colours and tonalities of the concertos as they originally appeared.

CHAN 0792(3)

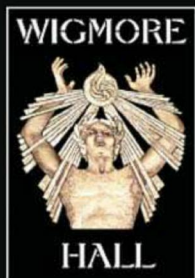
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Martin Cullingford discusses Britten with Candida Thompson and James Jolly speaks to Sir John Eliot Gardiner, who celebrates his 70th birthday this year

NEWS AND FEATURES

Enjoy the *Gramophone* guides to Bach, Bruckner, Beethoven and Brahms, featuring recording recommendations for all the major works

THE GRAMOPHONE PLAYER

Hear tracks from all of this month's *Gramophone* Choice recordings alongside selections from the recommended recordings in the Collection

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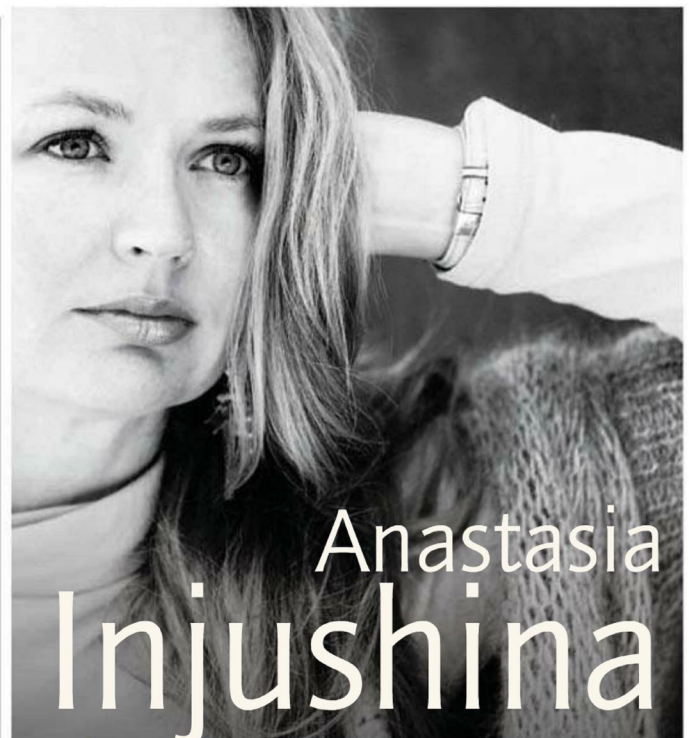
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*'I'm just someone
who loves to
make music'*

Sir John Eliot Gardiner

PHOTOGRAPHY: SHEILA ROCK/DECCA



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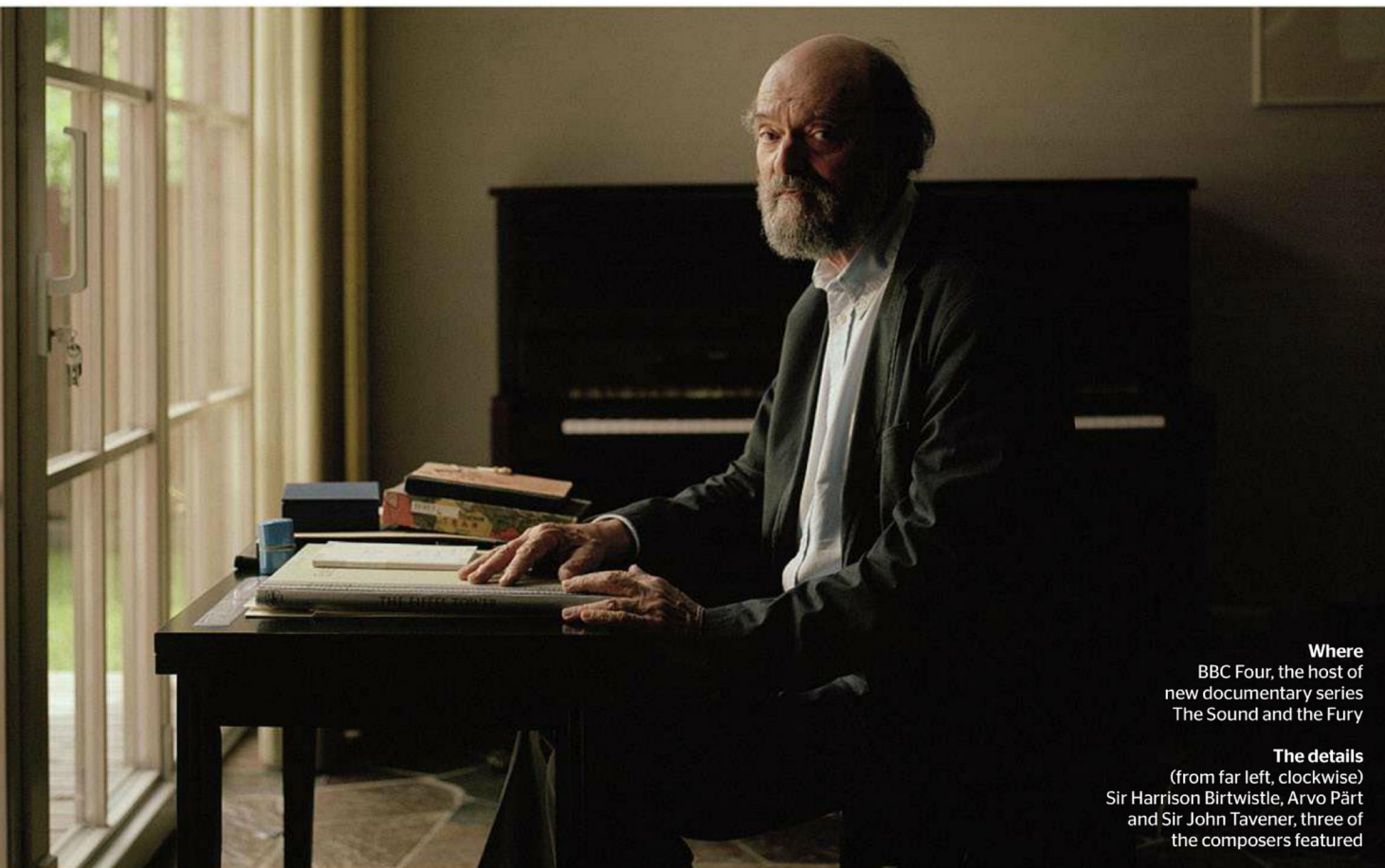
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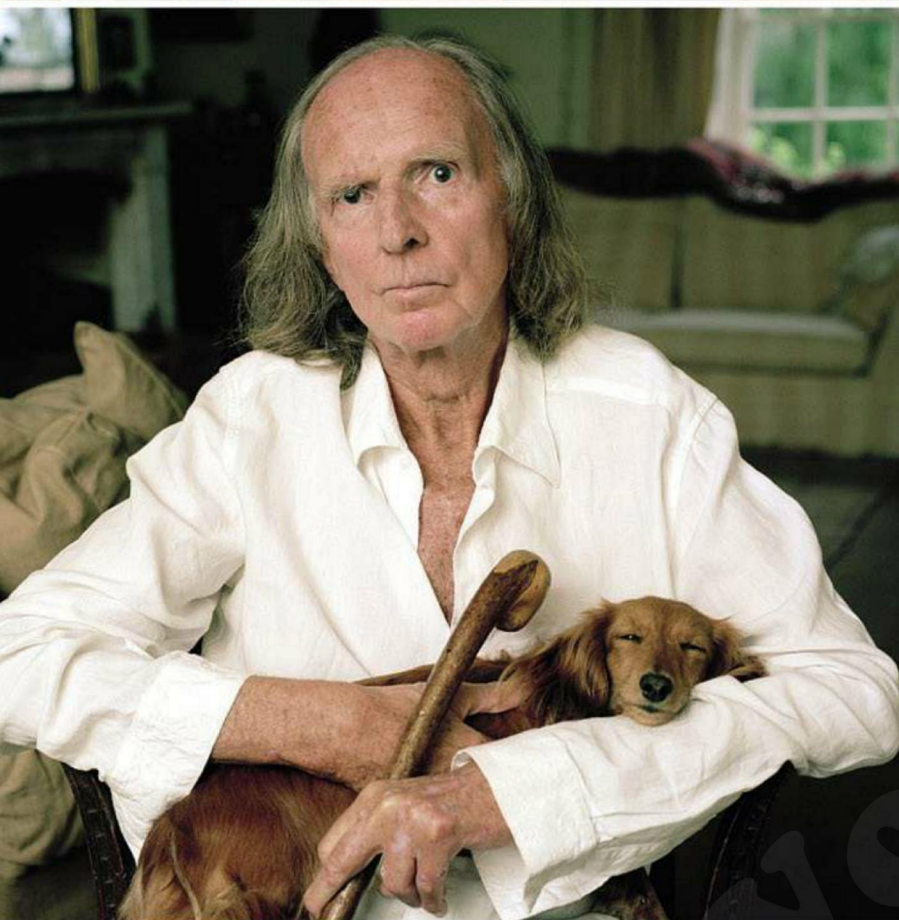
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Where
BBC Four, the host of
new documentary series
The Sound and the Fury

The details
(from far left, clockwise)
Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Arvo Pärt
and Sir John Tavener, three of
the composers featured



Faces of modern music

The popularity of *The Rest is Noise*, Alex Ross's compelling survey of classical music in the 20th century, was a watershed moment for those who still doubted that there was anything but a fringe audience for classical music of our time. Now it has sparked a year-long festival of 20th- and 21st-century music at London's Southbank Centre, to which the BBC has contributed three hour-long documentaries charting the turbulent evolution of music since 1900 in a series called *The Sound and the Fury: A Century of Modern Music*. The programmes were shown to the public as part of the opening weekend of *The Rest is Noise* festival in January but will be broadcast on BBC Four in late February.

The first episode, 'Wrecking Ball', features composers discussing the cultural battles of the early 20th century and the revolutions sparked by the likes of Schoenberg and Stravinsky. The second episode, 'Free for All', deals with how composers used music to rebel against oppressive regimes. And finally, 'Easy Listening?' focuses on minimalism, the return to tonality and the ways in which composers today are finding wider audiences. Those featured in the series include Alex Ross, Pierre Boulez, John Adams, Arvo Pärt, Steve Reich, Sir John Tavener and Sir Harrison Birtwistle. The series is broadcast on February 12, 19 and 26. Each episode will be available on the BBC iPlayer for up to seven days following its initial broadcasts and is likely to be repeated on BBC Four later in the year. **G**

NEW RELEASES



ROMEO & JULIET Prokofiev Royal Opera House

Kenneth MacMillan's first full-evening ballet has become a signature work for the Company, enjoying great popularity around the world. Although The Royal Ballet has performed *Romeo and Juliet* over 400 times, each performance and pairing is subtly different, and Lauren Cuthbertson and Federico Bonelli are utterly captivating in the title roles. This performance was broadcast live from Covent Garden to cinemas worldwide.

AVAILABLE ON DVD & BLU-RAY



ARIANE ET BARBE-BLEUE Dukas Liceu

Based on Maeterlinck's symbolist version of the classic tale, free spirit Ariane become the sixth wife of the infamous Barbe-bleue, who gives his new bride seven keys to seven doors, but prohibits the use of the last. José van Dam is cast as the villainous Barbe-bleue, while Jeanne-Michèle Charbonnet takes on the immensely demanding role of Ariane.

AVAILABLE ON DVD & BLU-RAY



IPHIGÉNIE EN AULIDE & IPHIGÉNIE EN TAURIDE Gluck De Nederlandse Opera

Gluck's operatic settings are very rarely staged together, but here Pierre Audi's production makes a darkly compelling case for their dramatic unity. This recording features a wealth of early-music exponents including Veronique Gens and Mireille Delunsch, conducted by Marc Minkowski.

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PSC1323



FREDÉRIC CHOPIN: Rondeau · Trois Nouvelles Études
Impromptu in A flat Major · Impromptu in F sharp Major
Impromptu in G flat Major
ROBERT SCHUMANN: Waldszenen · Blumenstück
PSC1307

His Chopin has a liquid quality, clearly defined but with an elasticity that points towards some of the all-time pianistic greats. (Classic FM Magazine)



FRODE HALTLI:
ARNE NORDHEIM
COMPLETE ACCORDION WORKS
PSC1328

Inquisitive and engrossing, it's at once alienating and beguiling, the suburban timbre of the accordion defied by its employment. (The Independent)



BACH AND TELEMANN
CONCERTOS FOR VIOLA AND BASSOON
Martin Kuuskmann, bassoon · Lars Anders Tomter, viola
181 Chamber Orchestra · Jan Bjøranger, leader
PSC1326



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BERNARD SALLES · GIACINTO SCELSE · GYÖRGY KURTÁG
OLAV ANTON THOMMESSEN · TEPPU HAUTA-AHO

Dan Styffe, double bass · Peter Herresthal, violin ·
Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra · Jukka-Pekka Saraste, conductor
PSC1324

Dan Styffe displays fluent lyricism and luminous tone. (The Strad)

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NEWS ANALYSIS

Rattle is to step down from the Berlin Phil in five years – but who will replace him?

As the new year broke, the musical world was abuzz with the news that Sir Simon Rattle is to step down as chief conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic. Admittedly, the date for Rattle's departure is some five years down the track – in the summer of 2018 – but that didn't stop an immediate flurry of conversations, centred around who is to replace him.

Rattle himself is not unaware of the difficulty of appointing the right person to such a coveted and high-profile role, giving this as the reason for his early announcement: 'In 2018 I will have been with the orchestra for 16 years. Before this I was chief conductor in Birmingham for 18 years. In 2018 I will be nearly 64 years old. As a Liverpool boy, it is impossible not to think of the Beatles' question, "Will you still need me...when I'm 64?" and I am sure that then it will be time for somebody else to take on the magnificent challenge that is the Berliner Philharmoniker.'

'This was not an easy decision,' he continued. 'I love this orchestra and therefore wanted to tell them my decision as early as possible. I deeply hope that this will give them enough time to start new plans. I look forward with great pleasure to our next five years together and hopefully many years afterwards. I am thankful for the time that we have spent together so far.'

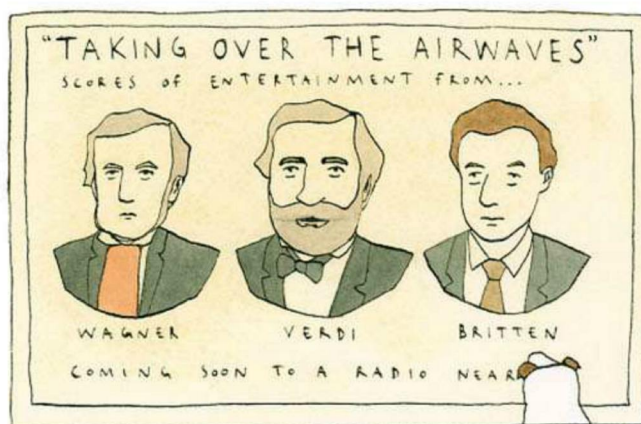
So who can fill Rattle's shoes? Inevitably it must be someone who can continue to shape 'the national and international perception of the Berliner Philharmoniker as a vital cultural ambassador for Berlin', according to the orchestra's general

'As a Liverpool boy, it's impossible not to think of the Beatles' question, "Will you still need me...when I'm 64?"'

manager Martin Hoffmann. Age, experience and reputation will all have their parts to play – not to mention the right chemistry with the musicians and a sympathetic approach to repertoire and interpretation. Five years may at first glance seem an age but, for the Berlin Philharmonic, it's probably just enough time to get it right.

Announcements of new commissions and premieres have come thick and fast of late – a heartening comment on the state of a vibrant musical scene defying the continued economic gloom. The Royal Philharmonic Society, which has chosen to mark its 200th anniversary throughout 2013 with a number of new commissions from the likes of Sir Harrison Birtwistle and Judith Weir, unveiled its *pièce de résistance* on January 24, the exact date of its founding 200 years ago: Mark-Anthony Turnage is to compose a new work inspired by Beethoven's Ninth Symphony – the RPS's most famous commission – which will be premiered at the BBC Proms. Also on the radar was the PRS for Music Foundation, which launched a New Music Biennial designed to support up to 20 new commissions to be performed around the UK during 2014.

But it was the Royal Opera House that, in January, unveiled the most comprehensive plan for new music, revealing its strategy for commissions up to and including 2020. Keen to signal its



continued commitment to contemporary music, despite the recent closure of ROH2, music director Antonio Pappano and director of opera Kasper Holten spoke of 15 new works to be presented either on the main Covent Garden stage or in the Linbury Studio Theatre.

The year 2020 will see four new ROH operas by Kaija Saariaho, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Luca Francesconi and Jörg Widmann, each taking as their starting point the same questions: 'What preoccupies us today? What are the collective myths of our present and future?' Between now and 2020, the company will also stage new works by Ben Frost, Philip Glass, Georg Friedrich Haas, Thomas Adès and Unsuk Chin.

'New work is not and should not be at the periphery of our programme, but right at the core of what and who we are,' said Kasper Holten. 'And this is something we do, not because we must, but because it is something that we are passionate about. We hope that opera audiences will share our curiosity and come with us with open minds along this journey.'

It is certainly heartening that despite reported losses of £2.2m during 2011-12 for fellow opera company ENO, Royal Opera is refusing to shy away from experimentation. 'There is not and should not be a guarantee of success for every single piece, only for innovation and risk-taking,' said Holten.

BC Radio 3 will be alive with operatic performance throughout 2013, as the three major composers celebrating anniversaries during the year – Wagner, Verdi and Britten – take over the airwaves with 140 hours of music. The station will broadcast every opera by the three greats, including live performances and recordings from the Met, Royal Opera House, English National Opera, Vienna State Opera, La Scala and the Aldeburgh Festival. Highlights include *Peter Grimes* live from Aldeburgh (June 7) and *Gloriana* live from Covent Garden (June 29), plus *Das Rheingold* (April 6), *Die Walküre* (April 13), *Siegfried* (April 20) and *Götterdämmerung* (May 11), all live from the Met. **Charlotte Smith**



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MUSICIAN'S DIARY

Imogen Cooper

The pianist looks back at 2012 – when she recorded her Schumann and Brahms CD for Chandos and took Schubert on tour

Now that the new year is in full swing, I'm hoping that 2013 will be as good a year as the last. I don't have a particular ritual of reviewing the passing year but I have found myself glancing at last year's dog-eared diary – yes, still that sort – to see which events produce a large smile in me.

It started well when I took myself off to the depths of the French countryside to work, walk, read and just live in the complete silence, embellished as it was by deep frost and a full moon. My friends didn't have a grand piano, so I rented one, and its arrival over the wet grass was the big village event. Unfortunately, it made too much sound for the room it was in, so I ended up practising with wax earplugs jammed in, the piano closed and blankets everywhere to soak up the sound. It was still a fruitful and wonderful time.

Most important were my days at Snape Maltings in July, making my first CD for Chandos. Wonderful music; dark, luminous, disturbed Schumann, and a rich Brahms arrangement (of his own string sextet) made for Clara Schumann. Known to me were the Maltings acoustics, and the extraordinary feel of history in that huge space, still inhabited in a ghostly way by all the musicians I revered in my younger days – Britten, Pears, Rostropovich, Fischer-Dieskau. The unknown was my recording team, producer Rachel Smith and sound engineer Jonathan Cooper – we had never worked together before. Would we hear the same things? How would our chemistry be? Would I keep calm and energised or feel drained by the pressure? This was also my first 'studio' recording

'It's rather like running the marathon compared with running the 100m'

in many years, my previous nine CDs having been live, which is a different pressure – rather like running the marathon compared with running the 100m. And the piano: I knew it from concerts but how would I feel about it over a matter of days?

I needn't have worried. Set up by the wonderful Uli Gerhartz and maintained by the patient Peter Law, the piano was inspiring; it not only fulfilled all my desires but also engendered quite a few new ones. This is the wonderful thing about regularly changing instruments – every piano, good or indifferent, can give you a new idea. The team were a real delight, sort of enabling angels who, while doing a thorough job, helped me to fly. The sun shone for the first time in weeks and blessed the intensity of our work. I was in heaven.

At the end of the year I toured with Paul Lewis, over six concerts or so. The main work was Schubert's *Grand Duo*, D812, which –



special delivery: the grand piano was wheeled over wet winter grass



Which piano would tolerate having its lid removed? Paul always knew the answer!



Here I'm flanked by my 'enabling angels', Jonathan Cooper and Rachel Smith

as passionate Schubertians – we both adore. We had a missionary zeal to make others love it too; surprisingly many don't, and indeed it needs a gentle hand, or four to be precise, to yield its best secrets. Having given it its first airing on one piano at Paul's Midsummer Music festival, we decided that we would do the whole programme on two pianos, to regain our physical freedom by not crowding each other, and so that we could both pedal – the sustaining pedal is an integral part of any pianist's sound if imaginatively used and to have it taken away is agony for the deprived player. There was inevitably, therefore, a flurry of decision-making at the beginning of each rehearsal on concert days: which piano would sound better in *primo* position? (Mine, at Paul's insistence.) And which would tolerate having its lid taken off? Paul was by far the most incisive at such moments – and was always right.

We're great friends but I don't suppose either of us had imagined quite what an unalloyed joy the experience would be. There was an uncanny osmosis between us and a sort of wonder at the sounds we seemed to be able to produce with our two pianos tucked one into the other. There was the occasional dangerous moment: I'm a terrible giggler, and when the slightest unexpected thing occurred I knew not to catch Paul's eye as it could have been catastrophic. But, all in all, this feast of Schubert, interspersed with life-enhancing Brahms and Dvořák dances, reminded us both of how effortless music-making can (and sometimes should) be. And it's fun!

► To read Gramophone's review of Imogen Cooper's new CD, turn to page 68

Jake Heggie

Against the odds, this neo-tonalist became an overnight success, says David Patrick Stearns

Oscar Wilde's aphorism 'Be yourself; everyone else is already taken' has extra significance for Heggie, who wouldn't have become one of America's most successful opera composers if he hadn't heeded that advice. After achieving solid success with his first opera, *Dead Man Walking* (2000), he recommitted to the idea, vowing to write only the music that he wanted to write, as opposed to the music he *could* write, which for him encompasses a vast array of options.

The artistic consolidation he's achieved since then is represented in his latest opera, *Moby-Dick*, which was premiered in 2010 in Dallas, triumphed again in 2012 in San Francisco and is taking its place beside the great sea operas. The larger significance is what this says about him and his neo-tonal contemporaries, who all had trouble gaining respect from academic music circles that continued to believe there were no more good pieces to be written in C major. Heggie's handling of the large-scale, atmospheric forces of *Moby-Dick* helped establish neo-tonalism as a legitimate 21st-century genre, not just an echo of the previous century's Copland/Barber/Menotti generation.

More than return-to-tonality pioneers such as David Del Tredici and George Rochberg, Heggie, now 51, draws on the precedence of the mid-20th-century Americans, as well as composers from Mozart to Mahler, with an immediacy that tells us these figures are not of the past. They are our world; they have shaped our inner lives. The better neo-tonalists are the ones who employ this mostly received musical

'Heggie leaves room for the audience's imagination to participate in the opera'

vocabulary with a conviction suggesting they invented it themselves. Heggie doesn't always achieve that distinction in his instrumental and choral works, but does so in opera consistently and with great emotional impact, perhaps because he was once the kind of composer he later rebelled against.

A pianist from an early age, Florida-born Heggie attended UCLA and studied with Johana Harris (widow of composer Roy Harris), whom he married in 1982. He left the marriage in 1993 and moved to San Francisco. While working in the San Francisco Opera press office, he began writing songs in his now-characteristic style. He tried out his music with the likes of Frederica von Stade and began turning up on high-profile song recital programmes.

After a special-occasion piece written for a local gala concert, Heggie was appointed composer-in-residence at the San Francisco Opera. He was paired with the noted playwright Terrence McNally to create *Dead Man Walking*, the real-life story of Sister Helen Prejean counselling a convicted killer on death row. The solidity of the opera is due partly to Heggie's use of workshops: at a time when major works such as Nicholas Maw's *Sophie's Choice* were premiered with no dry run, Heggie tried out his opera behind closed doors, where he reportedly rewrote vocal lines on the spot. Also, he held off writing the crucial execution scene that ends the opera until after the workshop experience.

The opera has since had 28 runs, and has become a repertory item at the Dresden Semperoper. Each of Heggie's subsequent operas explores



Jake Heggie (b1961): his operas are firmly grounded in realism

a different idea of what the medium can be. In contrast to the American *verismo* of *Dead Man Walking*, his *Three Decembers* (2008) is a domestic chamber opera about the hothouse world of a Broadway actress who must confess to her family that her long-departed husband committed suicide by jumping in front of a New York subway train. *Moby-Dick* is true grand opera. His next piece, *Great Scott*, again with McNally as librettist, is a backstage comedy set in the *bel canto* era.

What they all share is a firm grounding in realism; they may have magic, but they're not fantastical. In his early 'operatic scene' *Again*, Heggie cut the *deus ex machina* character who arrived from the heavens to set everything right; theatrical contrivances aren't his friend. Instead of thematic development, he tends to have recurring motifs recostumed and repositioned. The one part of *Dead Man Walking* that doesn't entirely ring true is the Act 1 finale when Sister Helen collapses in exhaustion; you sense that Heggie would prefer to have continued the story without intermission rather than finding a climax in that scene.

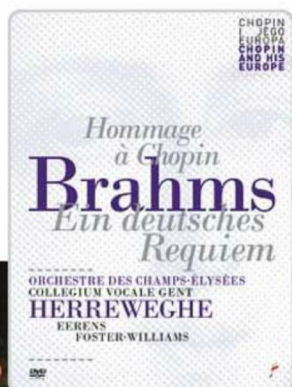
One recurring criticism is that Heggie's music lacks the gravity needed for some of the harder-hitting subjects he takes on. It is true that he has yet to use anything like the deafening electronic *crescendo* of the acclaimed David T Little opera *Dog Days*. But his *To Hell and Back* (2006) has moments that are almost unbearable when, amid benign everyday life, instances of severe domestic violence are uncovered. Heggie leaves room for the audience's imagination to participate in the opera, something that doesn't always happen when the opera itself is supplying all the dramatic information. The most common problem in American opera is recitative, which seems to lapse inevitably into slow-tempo laboriousness. Again, Heggie's sense of realism comes to the rescue. In *Three Decembers*, his recitatives move with the speed and rhythm of conversation. And isn't that, according to those who invented the art form in 16th-century Italy, what opera is supposed to be? **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING

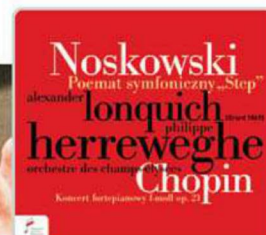


Dead Man Walking
Joyce DiDonato, Philip Cutlip
Houston Grand Opera / Patrick Summers
Virgin Classics © 202463-2 (5/12)

NEW RECORDINGS



[NIFCDVD-003]
Ilse Eerens *soprano*
Andrew Foster-Williams *baritone*
Orchestre des Champs-Élysées
Collegium Vocale Gent
Philippe Herreweghe *conductor*
 —
JOHANNES BRAHMS [1833–1897]
Ein deutsches Requiem for soprano, baritone, chorus and orchestra



[NIFCCD-031]
Alexander Lonquich *piano* [Erard, 1849]
Orchestre des Champs-Élysées
Philippe Herreweghe *conductor*
 —
ZYGMUNT NOSKOWSKI [1846–1909]
Symphonic poem Step [The Steppe]
FRYDERYK CHOPIN [1810–1849]
Piano Concerto in F minor

ORCHESTRE DES CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES
**PHILIPPE
 HERREWEGHE**



[NIFCCD-029]
Yulianna Avdeeva *piano* [Erard, 1849]
Orchestra of the 18th Century
Frans Brüggen *conductor*
 —
FRYDERYK CHOPIN [1810–1849]
Piano Concerto in F minor
Piano Concerto in E minor



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SESSION REPORT The Philharmonia's Planets

Works *Holst: The Planets; Talbot: Worlds, stars, systems, infinity*

Artists *Philharmonia Orchestra* Venue *Watford Colosseum, Watford*

Conductor *Esa-Pekka Salonen* Audio producer *Misha Donat*

Engineers *Steve Long & Mike Hatch* Date of session *Jan 24, 2012* Words *Charlotte Smith*

It's a rainy, windswept morning in late January 2012 and I've just entered a living, breathing spaceship whose exterior appears for all the world to be the Watford Colosseum. In fact, this peculiar hub of wires, multiple screens and flashing lights is the recording centre for the Philharmonia's new immersive project, the 'Universe of Sound'. The work – absolutely in keeping with the futuristic surroundings – is Holst's visionary *The Planets*, shortly to be captured by 37 cameras and a mass of microphones. This 'recording' will later form the basis of a major digital installation in residence at London's Science Museum (May 23 to July 8, 2012) and subsequently released on DVD.

This interactive exhibition (a follow-up to the 2009 'Re-Rite' project) allows audiences to experience an orchestra from the inside via giant 360-degree projections, a series of 10 rooms each representing an orchestral section, and connected Pods, which offer the opportunity to participate as musicians, arrangers, conductors and composers.

These technical requirements have rendered the session more science experiment than concert. The orchestral seating plan is stretched to its limits, providing space for reams of recording wires and cameras, and dividing various sections of players with black curtains to capture separate viewpoints. Such visual restrictions mean conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen's baton work is of paramount importance, providing an essential focal point for all players.

The entire *Planets* will be recorded in just two takes, so an air of concentration and seriousness takes hold as the musicians gather for their first run-through. The playing has all the intensity of a live

performance, particularly rich and mellow in the strings. As each movement ends there's total silence, a quick wipe of the brow and then they're off again. It's professional, calm, matter-of-fact even – the players have, after all, performed this work many times. The final part of the project is a newly commissioned companion piece by Joby Talbot, *Worlds, Stars, Systems, Infinity*, which journeys away from our own familiar sun into deeper, uncharted space.

In many ways the Philharmonia are forging their own uncharted paths with this recording, merging the latest innovative technologies with refined symphonic traditions in the quest for new audiences. Trombonist Christian Jones agrees that the cameras and restricted sightlines certainly 'concentrate the mind', but believes such difficulties are worthwhile, as 'the visual aspect will allow the audience to see the mechanics of how an orchestra works'.

'I always feel in concert that we sit too far away from the audience,' he explains, 'whereas today I'm very conscious of the camera looking

'In any field of interest, be it wine, food or art, the more you know, the deeper your pleasure'

– Esa-Pekka Salonen



1 Inside the Universe of Sound, where the orchestral seating plan is stretched to its limits

2 For Salonen, the pressure of multiple cameras amounts to little more than ensuring people make an effort to look presentable

3 Salonen with composer Joby Talbot, whose companion piece to *The Planets* forms the final part of the project



right at me as I'm about to play. And there are all these little details that you wouldn't normally get if you were hearing us live.'

Jones also took part in the 'Re-Rite' recording and answered questions from the public at the installation itself. 'It was nice to explain to people who are unfamiliar with an orchestra what we're about,' he says. 'We showed the orchestra warts and all, but members of the public still had countless questions and many remained for the duration of the work. I remembered how interesting it can be for people who aren't familiar with classical music.'

Salonen has wholeheartedly embraced such interaction. Part of the reasoning behind Talbot's involvement is (the composer tells me) Salonen's desire to have 'music written with the installation in mind and the interactive possibilities that are inherent in the way it is presented'. Indeed, for the conductor, the pressure of multiple cameras is nothing in the pursuit of audience involvement, amounting to little more than 'making sure people wash their hair and wear clean socks on the day of filming'.

'I don't think the aim of a production like this should be that of emulating a live performance,' Salonen says. 'It's something totally different, something that will give you an insight into the inner workings of an orchestra. I hope that this will be used for years in education projects around the world.' He agrees that such forensic detail risks eroding 'the element of mystery'; but, he says, 'the more you know about the universe, the larger and more complicated it seems'. 'In any field of interest, be it wine, food or art, the more you know, the deeper your pleasure. But what really happens between conductor and musicians is still mysterious because it's like telepathy.'

And ultimately Salonen is correct. The strange alienating effect of the spaceship-like recording session is simply a means of marrying old and new technologies – an orchestra determined to move with the times, making the most of those interactive avenues available in a new digital age. Like the planets themselves, the harmony and symmetry of the orchestra must always fascinate and inspire, and the closer one feels to the players, the more captivating the experience becomes. **G**

► To read Gramophone's review of the DVD, turn to page 47

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FOLLOW US ON



Arthur Rubinstein

Bryce Morrison recalls the flawless combination of Slavic passion and Gallic precision in this charismatic 'singer' pianist, who conducted a lifelong love affair with his audiences

Remarkably few musicians achieve iconic status, their reputation often clouded by extra-curricular considerations. Glenn Gould's eccentricity, for example, can distort an objective assessment of his contradictory art and, regarding those of a more temporary status, Eileen Joyce's glamour or the publicity surrounding Van Cliburn's triumph in the inaugural Tchaikovsky Piano Competition have masked assessments of their true calibre. Stephen Kovacevich feels that Dame Myra Hess acquired a comfortable Queen Mother status and regality that, while appealing to Americans in particular, compromised estimates of her stature.

But with Arthur Rubinstein (1887-1982) there is no such sense of diversion. How vividly I recall my parents' present of a children's encyclopedia where I came across a picture of Rubinstein and the statement 'When Rubinstein plays Chopin, you are carried away into another world'; heady and alluring stuff for a 10-year-old and an aspiring young pianist. Of course, there was image as well as musical reality. An engaging raconteur, Rubinstein was perhaps over-fond of regaling the press with such statements as 'I am the happiest man I know' or 'I adore Spain as I adore a woman, with tenderness'.

Talking to me many years ago, he confessed to a special love for Chopin's Barcarolle, claiming that after his performance he invariably succeeded in seducing the most beautiful woman in the room. True, Harvey Sachs's biography tells of a man susceptible to jealousy (Horowitz's success was a particular irritant, thus 'he may have possessed a great technique but I was the finer musician') and with a less than immaculate pedigree as a husband and father. But the playing – the musical truth – is where you strike gold.

You may miss recordings of music intimately associated with Rubinstein: Albéniz's *Iberia*, Szymanowski's Second Sonata and Stravinsky's *Petrushka* failed to materialise. Was it because he offered a 'helping hand' to composers, who would have complained that he did not play what they wrote, even when he made their writing more scintillating than the original? And you will note the absence of late Beethoven. Once a champion of the *Hammerklavier* Sonata, Rubinstein later felt that the great middle-period sonatas (the *Waldstein* and *Appassionata*) were more to the public taste.

But he recorded virtually all of Chopin, and even though his plans for the complete Etudes were never realised, his sets of the Mazurkas, Polonaises, Nocturnes and Scherzos of 1932-39 are beyond price, a legacy where patrician elegance combines with a heroic virtuosity – and an endearing touch of recklessness – to confirm Rubinstein as arguably the greatest of all Chopin pianists. He may have revisited these masterpieces on record throughout his life, seeking an ever-greater clarity and refinement, yet today we can listen to first offerings that were the antithesis of a more sentimental tradition.

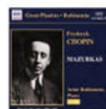
Chopin was a force of nature for Rubinstein, a man of fire and ice, a fellow patriot who wrote the tragic history of Poland in music. Rubinstein brought vigour and energy and a unique tonal elegance and finesse to every teeming page and idea. His way with

the Mazurkas (Chopin's confessional diary) allows for a give-and-take, a *rubato* (or musical breathing) that illuminates every harmonic and rhythmic twist and piquancy. And here is Rubinstein the great 'singer' pianist – enough to arouse envy in Callas or Fischer-Dieskau.

Puzzled by, say, Richter's 'Chinese water-torture' tempi in Schubert or Argerich's crazed volatility in Chopin, he sought a perfect balance of sense and sensibility, a flawless combination of Slavic passion and Gallic precision. And, above all, there was his charisma, ensnaring the far reaches of his audience and drawing everyone into his magical aura. Few pianists have aroused their listeners to such a fever pitch as they wait for their favourite encores (Chopin's Nocturne in F sharp; Falla's 'Ritual Fire Dance', with hands flailing like a threshing machine; or Villa-Lobos's 'Polichinelle').

Rubinstein chose an all-Chopin programme for his long-delayed return to Russia in 1964. He caused a furore, especially in the heroics of the A flat Polonaise, storming through the coda in a blaze of exultancy. But my closing memory is of Rubinstein's final recital, given at London's Wigmore Hall, where failing eyesight and physical infirmity seemingly left him in a performance of his encore, the C sharp minor Waltz. He often lamented a lack of *joie de vivre* in today's pianists, an obsession with the letter rather than the spirit of the score. In contrast, his career was a lifelong love affair with audiences, who responded in rapture. His 'voice', verve, charm and idiosyncrasy, his indelible sound and phraseology will remain with us forever, the stuff of legends and of true iconic glory. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Chopin
Mazurkas (1938-39)
Naxos © **G** 8 110656/7 (6/01)

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1934 – *Self-examination*

Undertakes a radical reassessment of his own art: 'I wouldn't like my children to grow up and think their Daddy was a second-rater.'

• 1955 – *Punishing schedule*

Five concerts of 17 concertos given in London, Paris and New York, leaving orchestras rather than Rubinstein limp with exhaustion.

• 1961 – *God bless America*

Gives 10 New York recitals in gratitude to his adopted country.

• 1976 – *Final recital*

Four months after his 89th birthday, gives his final recital at Wigmore Hall. Murray Perahia was later to say, 'No matter how long I live, I'll never be able to play Schumann's *Carnaval* a tenth as well as that.'

*'Rubinstein brought
vigour and energy
and a unique tonal
elegance and finesse
to every teeming
page and idea'*



Sense and sensibility:
Rubinstein at the piano,
around 1945

Decrypting Bach

Lindsay Kemp talks to *Richard Egarr* about Bach's enigmatic English Suites

As I ride the lift to the top-floor bar of the London hotel where I have arranged to meet Richard Egarr, I know what to expect: energetic talk, jollity, a few funny voices, and behind it all flashes of a high level of musicianship and engagement in the music of Bach. Egarr is one of those relatively rare harpsichordists who combines a busy conducting career – he has been music director of the Academy of Ancient Music since 2006 – with substantial involvement as a solo artist not just in a few minor areas of the repertoire but in the major works of Bach. His recordings of the *Goldberg Variations* and Book 1 of the '48' for Harmonia Mundi have already won plaudits and we are here now to discuss his latest project – the six so-called *English Suites*. He characterises them for me as 'large-scale and grand, with immense concerto-like Preludes. An interesting collection, too, because of how it was put together – you can really see a development of the musical material as you go through the set, particularly in the Gignues, culminating in the completely mad and manic final one with its diabolical twists and weird chromatic harmonies.'

We have both brought scores with us, though in different editions, and soon we are leafing through them. 'I had three or four different editions actually,' says Egarr. 'For the recording I just used the one with the best-placed page-turns. As I tell my students, it's all right buying an Urtext but you absolutely have to compare them all and read the reams of editorial commentary that go with them, otherwise you're just trusting whoever edited it. That's especially true with the *English Suites*, which don't survive in the composer's manuscript. And I'll

'This is slightly left-field, but it wouldn't surprise me if they were written with Handel in the background' – Richard Egarr

confess I even changed one note in the G minor Allemande – a B flat to a B natural in the right hand in bar 10. Very naughty, but I just fancied it; it's already a very strange bit of writing for Bach there and I wanted to make it even more smelly.'

Egarr gets most excited on the subject of number symbolism. The theory that Bach used symbolic number relationships to shape the structure or even the melody of a piece has little or no basis in written verbal evidence, but from his own experience of the notes Egarr is a firm believer. In the *English Suites* the crucial numbers would seem to be one (representing God), three (the Trinity) and seven (heavenly perfection): 'There are lots of structural multiples of three and seven in



Richard Egarr: sees number symbolism in the English Suites

the Third Suite,' he explains. 'The fugal theme in the Prelude is based on a three-note motif of a descending third, and there are six entries which end at bar seven. And the first *ritornello* ends at bar 33. Then in the E minor Prelude you get this crucifix-shaped fugal motif which enters in bars one, three and seven.'

Egarr's fingers fly across the pages as he points out these things (and more), and it is easy to find one's head spinning. But this is scholarly stuff; is it possible to be aware of it when actually playing the music? 'I think so,' Egarr says, 'because it's something I'm used to thinking about when I approach the music, and because I have a deep feeling that it was part of the way Bach constructed his music, the way he lived and breathed it.'

The *English Suites*' title is an enigma; it comes from an 18th-century manuscript copy in which they were said to be 'fait pour les Anglois'. But Egarr has a tentative answer to the suggestion that there is nothing specifically English in them. 'This is slightly left-field, but it wouldn't surprise me if they were written with Handel in the background. Handel's Suites were published in London in 1720, and when I play the Bach I get the feeling that there are a lot of similar sequences and harmonic gestures. Maybe he'd come across them and they'd inspired him to write a big-scale bunch of suites of his own. Who knows?' **G**

► To read Gramophone's review, turn to page 64



The historical view

Philipp Spitta
Johann Sebastian Bach: His Work and Influence on the Music of Germany, 1885

'The richer style of the music demands forms of greater extension. The character of the separate pieces is sharply and distinctively marked. Bach never wrote Sarabandes of such breadth and beauty, or Gignues of such wild boldness.'

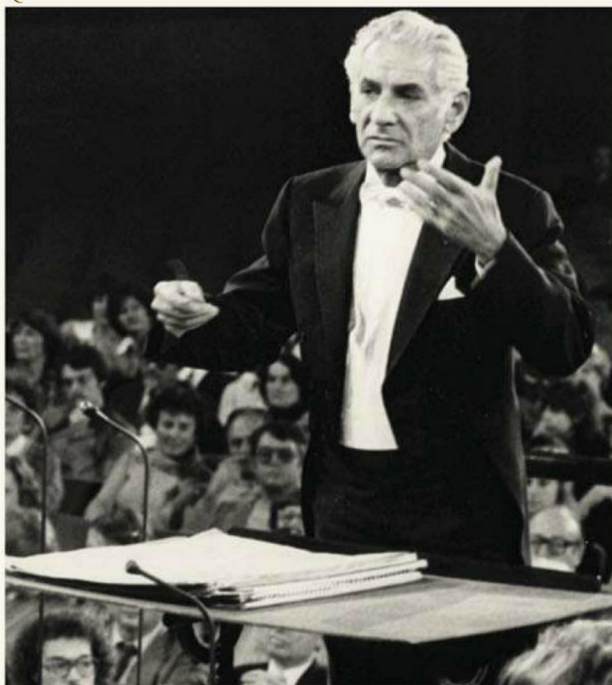
Charles Sanford Terry
The Music of Bach, 1933

'Their tone is of happy humour and good nature. It has been suggested that Bach was a disgruntled revolutionary, beating his wings with angry futility against the circumstances which confined him. The picture is out of drawing. He was an incorrigible optimist, and so his Suites proclaim him.'

Angela Hewitt
Booklet-note for her Hyperion disc of the English Suites (A/03)

'What makes and really identifies each of the English Suites is their opening Prelude which, with the exception of the first one in A major, are pieces of tremendous scope and intensity. They also demand the virtuosity that made Bach famous.'

QUIZ



Leonard Bernstein, who became one of my most active disciples

Who am I?

Pit your wits against Gramophone

I was deeply affected by the death of a sibling, whom I believed to be more talented than myself.

I achieved notable 'firsts' when I conducted ensembles including the BBC Symphony, Boston Symphony and New York Philharmonic Orchestras.

I caused a scandal when I flouted the rules in the early round of a well-known composition competition.

I knew Bernstein, Carter and Copland. After attending the premiere of *The Firebird*, I soon became an authority on the music of Stravinsky and, later, one of his closest friends.

A close relative of mine, on my father's side, was a member of Russian royalty.



The Firebird, among my first experiences of Igor Stravinsky

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NOTES & LETTERS

American symphonies • David Vickers's excellent taste • Vinci's countertenor-fest

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American omissions

I write regarding Peter Dickinson's Specialist's Guide on 'The golden age of the American Symphony' (December, page 94).

Ives: I've never heard the Litton performances and they may indeed be very good. But to my ears no one has even come close to the first-ever recording of Ives's Second Symphony by F Charles Adler in 1952. Fortunately that recording is going to be reissued this year by Music & Arts. The MTT Fourth does belong on the list.

Copland: The *Organ Symphony* is a student symphony that belongs on no one's list. The Third Symphony, however, is equally effective no matter who performs it.

The most obvious omission is Howard Hanson. His Second Symphony has three of the most beautiful melodies ever penned, ranging from smoky to nature-loving, and all lushly romantic. The Third Symphony is even better, to my ears, compellingly structured, and its big tune carries the day.

The only other composer I will mention is Roger Sessions, in my view the best composer that America has yet produced. But the nine symphonies of Sessions lack an established performance tradition while Copland, an inferior composer in every way, benefits from a vivid, living performance tradition. Sessions's lyrical language, like a fine wine, deepens in intensity and individuality with each succeeding symphony. But without a performance tradition, even greatness dies.

Ben Cutler, via email

Peter Dickinson writes: Early recordings of Ives's works are often based on a corrupt text before the clarifying work of the Charles Ives Society editions, so I avoided these. If Copland's *Organ Symphony* is a juvenile work, that alone doesn't deny its quality. Look at the teenage works of Mendelssohn or early Britten. Finally, I share Mr Cutler's concern about neglected composers but the world is tough. It was Damien Hirst who said 'If anything sells it's great, if it doesn't it's no good'. Copland sells – and it was Virgil Thomson who said: 'Don't underestimate the public.'

The potency of pop music

I read David Vickers's piece at the beginning of the Reviews section (December, page 47)

Letter of the Month



Maria Callas as Violetta in *La traviata*, c1955

Callas in *La traviata*

It was a joy to read Mike Ashman's tribute to *La traviata* and selected recordings of it (February, page 30). Inevitably, no discussions about *Traviata* recordings can be complete without those supreme and passionate readings by Maria Callas. MA mentioned that there are six versions bearing her name and focused upon the ones from La Scala (1955) and Lisbon (1958). Indeed, both of them are full of insights and unforgettable moments.

As a fervent collector of Callas recordings, I learned that there are seven different versions from her available. Apart from the sole studio performance

(1953, Cetra), fortunately we can still hear her two early assumptions of the role from Mexico (1951 and 1952), two collaborations with Visconti at La Scala (1955 and 1956) and another two uniquely touching readings from Lisbon and London in 1958. Her early efforts remain interesting. Nevertheless, I believe her attempts in 1958 would be remembered most vividly by many. The Covent Garden night seems to be especially affecting. In spite of her unsteady vocal conditions, she essayed the pathos of this much-loved masterpiece most wonderfully.

Wei-Chin Chen, New Taipei City, Taiwan

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Please send letters responding to articles in this issue, for consideration for publication in the April issue, by March 1. Gramophone reserves the right to edit all letters for publication.

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and felt he must have been looking through my record collection! I suspect he and I were both growing up in the same era and subject to the same influences. I was also listening to both rock music and the rich canon of classical music from my teenage years.

I think for me popular music evoked time and place in a way that classical music did not. I still remember exactly where I was when I first heard 'Eleanor Rigby' or 'A whiter shade of pale' but not Beethoven's Fifth or Schubert's *Winterreise*.

Earlier this month I listened to Diana Krall, Tom Waits and Ry Cooder at home before going to Turner Sims in Southampton for a wonderful concert with Sir James Galway and the Orchestra of Saint John's. As an encore Sir James played 'The Londonderry Air', and if there was a snuffle or tear in the house, it was then and not during the rest of the memorable concert.

Popular music can tug at heartstrings and memory in ways that other music sometimes cannot. Like David Vickers, I'm still listening to it after all these years.

Dr Nick Hayes

Southampton, Hants, UK

Incendiary Artaserse

Vinci's *Artaserse* richly deserves to have been declared Recording of the Month (January, page 44). I saw the concert version in Vienna. It was a great evening, what with the electrifying coloratura of Max Emanuel Cencic, the crystal-clear voice of Philippe Jaroussky, the amazing virtuosity of Franco Fagioli and the young Valer Barna-Sabadus, who sounded like a lark greeting the morning. Both Yuriy Mylenko and Daniel Behle pulled their weight, and Concerto Köln with Diego Fasolis were on top form.

The furore at the end continued when fans queued up for autographs. If someone had said 'Fire!', we might have been crushed!

Aino Bonāčič Slivnik

Ljubljana, Slovenia



Philippe Jaroussky: crystal-clear

OBITUARIES

A recording producer with a gift for swiftly becoming an artist's best friend



Gift for friendship: John West

JOHN H WEST

Recording producer

Born December 24, 1950

Died January 11, 2013

A colleague in the same profession as John West recently remarked that a good producer has, for the duration of a recording, to assume the role of an artist's best friend.

John West's gift for friendship ensured a bond with the artists who loved him that went beyond mere professional artifice. His insights into the personalities as well as the musical qualities of those with whom he worked inspired the affection of artists as diverse as the violinists Yehudi Menuhin and Tasmin Little, soprano Dame Felicity Lott and pianist James Rhodes. Many became close friends and delighted recipients of hospitality at the York home which John shared with Louis, his partner of over 40 years. A lifelong non-smoker, John was diagnosed with lung cancer over a year ago.

The catalogue is full of fine West productions, including the Beethoven and Elgar symphonies with Menuhin (Warner and Virgin Classics respectively), several CDs with Jeremy Backhouse's Vasari Singers (EMI), contributions to Hyperion's Romantic Piano Concerto series and much, including Dvořák symphonies, with Libor Pešek and the RLPO (Virgin). Actors, too, responded to his human qualities and clear involvement. Some years back, I found him editing a recording of *Peter and the Wolf* on which he had worked with Sir John Gielgud. A difficult edit was defeating him, and he was in tears. But not, I soon saw, because of frustration, but as a result of the veteran thespian's recounting of the duck's demise. I like to think that Gielgud would have been touched. **Andrew Keener**

To read this obituary in full, visit gramophone.co.uk

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Philip Clark surveys the recorded output of this German modernist in our Specialist's Guide

Korngold's legacy

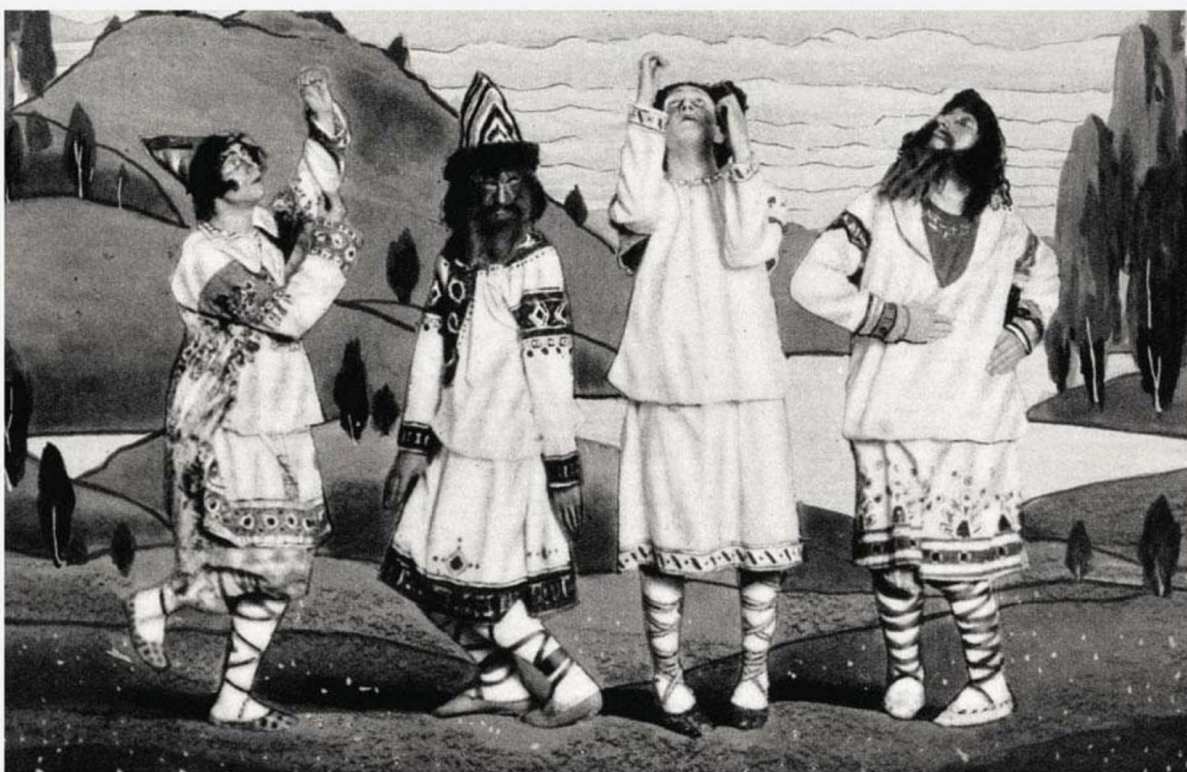
David Gutman assesses the recording history of his Violin Concerto in Collection

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The Rite of Spring

One of the 20th century's most influential masterpieces was premiered 100 years ago this year. We celebrate Stravinsky's musical revolution



'A gentleman's shiny top hat was pulled down over his eyes, and canes were brandished like menacing implements of combat' – Pierre Monteux

The conductor of *The Rite's* premiere wasn't the only one aghast at the audience's behaviour. But what caused the riot and was it in fact entirely to be expected? Geoffrey Norris investigates

Russian music has ignited its fair share of scandals. Given that nowadays we can only experience them second-hand through highly coloured, sometimes conflicting reports of what went on, it would be wonderful to have been a fly on the wall and know for ourselves, for example, whether Glazunov really was tipsy when he conducted the calamitous performance of Rachmaninov's First Symphony in 1897. Or, as one critic sarcastically remarked, whether Prokofiev really did sound as if he were dusting the piano keys and hitting high and low notes at random when he confronted the St Petersburg public with his Second Concerto in 1913. But it was that other scandal, the furore far away in Paris at the first performance of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (or *Le sacre du printemps*, to give it its French title), that dominated the 1913 headlines. The Théâtre des Champs-Élysées was, by all accounts, a battleground.

Diaghilev was by no means a stranger to controversy. While he was thoroughly zealous about presenting new works on the ballet stage, he must also have been aware of the no-such-thing-as-bad-publicity principle. With Nijinsky's radical choreography, the Ballets Russes productions were always going to attract attention, positive or adverse, and if that made Diaghilev nervous, his company did not go unnoticed. A year before *The Rite's* premiere, Nijinsky's erotic writhing at the end of his ballet based on Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* had been greeted with fervent applause mixed with boos and hisses by the glitterati at Paris's Châtelet. In Vienna it was Stravinsky's music for *Petrushka* that Diaghilev had had to defend in the face of the orchestral musicians' objections that it was 'dirty' and 'obscene'. The premiere of Debussy's *Jeux*, given at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées only a fortnight before *The Rite*, had triggered sniggers and incomprehension at the angular actions on stage and had spurred Debussy himself to comment that Nijinsky's 'cruel and barbarous choreography...had trampled all over my poor rhythms like so many weeds'.

The 'young Nijinsky savage', as Debussy dubbed him, was also responsible for the choreography of *The Rite*, to which he devoted much more preparation time than he did to *Jeux*. Nevertheless, there was apprehension in the Diaghilev coterie. In every sense, *The Rite* was to be a journey into the unknown. For one thing, the Ballets Russes had moved from its customary home at the Châtelet to the (then)

ultramodern Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, designed by the architect Auguste Perret for the Parisian impresario Gabriel Astruc, whose artistic broad-mindedness can be judged from the fact that he not only collaborated with Diaghilev but also was the manager of the exotic dancer Mata Hari. Jean Cocteau thought the Champs-Élysées was too functional for a well-heeled public accustomed to sumptuous furnishings and luxurious drapes, but its newness was entirely apt for the groundbreaking *Rite*, one of several ballets and operas that Diaghilev was presenting for the theatre's opening season. However,

'There was apprehension in the Diaghilev coterie. In every sense, The Rite was to be a journey into the unknown'



Trailblazer: Sergey Diaghilev (left) with Igor Stravinsky

the Parisian audience, content to flutter its fans in coy embarrassment at Nijinsky's antics in *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* and to sit flummoxed through *Jeux*, would not let *The Rite* go by quietly. Press reports of the dress rehearsal on the day before the premiere were largely positive and tantalising, though there were rumours that the first-night audience was in for a tough time. First, there was Nijinsky's jerky choreography. Secondly, there were the primitivist, tent-like costumes by Nikolay Roerich, as far removed from conventional ballet attire as could be imagined. And thirdly there was Stravinsky's uncompromisingly revolutionary music. Many years later, Stravinsky maintained that he hadn't anticipated anything untoward, but Count Harry Kessler, an intimate of the Diaghilev circle, recorded in his diary that all the key figures in the project were expecting an uproar.

*'I was at Nijinsky's side in the wings.
He was standing on a chair,
screaming "16, 17, 18"' – Igor Stravinsky*

Even before the curtain went up on the evening of May 29, 1913, the music itself provoked the first disturbances. The sight of the weirdly clothed dancers in distorted poses only fuelled consternation further – according to Kessler, the audience was 'laughing, whispering, making jokes'. Later on, when the prima ballerina Maria Piltz was holding her head during the 'Sacrificial Dance', some wag called out for the services of a dentist. Stravinsky was appalled. As he later recalled in his autobiography, 'These demonstrations, at first isolated, soon became general, provoking counter-demonstrations and very quickly developing into a terrific uproar. During the whole performance I was at Nijinsky's side in the wings. He was standing on a chair, screaming "16, 17, 18" – they had their own method of counting to keep time. Naturally the poor dancers could hear nothing by reason of the row in the auditorium.' The writer Gustave de Pawlowski said, 'It was only by straining our ears amid an indescribable racket that we could, painfully, get some rough idea of the new work, prevented from hearing it as much by its defenders as by its attackers.'

One of those defenders was the composer Florent Schmitt, who laid into the naysayers: 'These so-called "society" people, unable to see, hear and feel for themselves, these grown-up children...could only respond to these splendours [of *The Rite*], immeasurably remote from their feeble understanding, with the stupid hilarity of infants.'

'Where on earth were these pigs brought up?' asked Pawlowski, acknowledging that his question was somewhat crude. But, he said, 'It puts in a nutshell the astonishment we should feel in witnessing the stupid and intentional nastiness of what is euphemistically called "the Paris elite" in the presence of any really new and bold innovation.'

Whether it was infantile or provoked by genuine disgruntlement, whether it was spontaneous or orchestrated, the riot at *The Rite of Spring* has entered the annals of music history, making this work's premiere one of the most notorious of all time. On the upside, it did at least indicate that the pre-First World War Parisian audiences were alive to what was happening in the cultural milieu of their age, even if it meant that on this occasion, according to the conductor Pierre Monteux, 'A gentleman's shiny top hat or soft fedora was ignominiously pulled down over his eyes, and canes were brandished like menacing implements of combat all over the theatre.' Despite the melee, Monteux did manage to steer the performance to its conclusion, and both Stravinsky and Nijinsky took curtain calls. Ultimately, *The Rite of Spring* itself emerged as the victor in the debacle, surviving its rowdy reception and confounding its detractors. And Diaghilev's verdict? 'Just what I wanted.'



Stravinsky and Nijinsky at the premiere of *Petrushka* – two years before *The Rite*

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Rhythmic drive and clean, luminous orchestral textures lend Salonen's performance a visceral thrill.

Rewriting The Rite

From Messiaen and Boulez to Reich and Zappa, no musician after Stravinsky could fail to be influenced by his revolutionary ballet score, writes Philip Clark

And so music could never be the same again. The morning after the premiere before, every musician in Paris woke up with *The Rite of Spring* pulsating through their being. And there were no exceptions. Bassoonists were gripped by vertigo. It was reported in the local Paris press that one such bassoon practitioner, during his orchestra's accompaniment of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, started twitching frantically before pitching every note three octaves higher than written. Meanwhile, string players were forbidden from articulating melodic lines with up-bows by French government decree: each note now had to be pounced on with a punky down-bow. In a culture once proud of its chanson tradition, timpanists were the new stars. All around Montmartre, and later migrating to the provinces, nightclubs opened where adoring crowds could assemble to witness the stick-tastic spectacle of timpanists recreating their moves from *The Rite*; two shows each night, three on Saturdays. And, to seal the deal in this post-*Rite of Spring* environment, a committee of composers was convened to rewrite (or as Poulenc wryly put it, 're-Rite') every pre-existing piece of music after the image of Stravinsky's ballet. And there were no exceptions. Milhaud was proud to unveil his bitonal reharmonisations of the Schubert piano sonatas. Georges Auric was tasked with rebaring the Beethoven symphonies, threading alternating bars of 5/16 and 3/8 through the *Eroica* and turning the *Choral* Symphony's Turkish march into a rhythmically asymmetrical, pagan stampede. And all existing copies of Schubert sonatas and Beethoven symphonies were then discreetly pulped. And there were no exceptions. And no one minded.

And anyone reading the more sensationalist histories about the aftershock of the scandal could be forgiven for believing that that's how it was – that the course of music history had been transformed in an instant: *The Rite* as modern music's Pearl Harbor. But music doesn't operate like that. The message takes time to seed, to blossom and be understood. Not that we should begrudge classical-music mythology the thrills and sonic spills of *The Rite of Spring*'s premiere. If only more newly written music could incite audiences to hurl objects into orchestras. If only audiences today cared enough about new music to allow themselves to be provoked in that way. But here's the truth: a few days after its premiere, *The Rite*'s first Paris run was a sell-out. The score was acknowledged as a work of unheralded genius, and a feeding frenzy of debate and analysis followed wherever it went – ballet stage or concert hall. Because it was no '4'33" conceptual riddle, nor was anybody required to feel their way towards processing material on an entirely new level of consciousness like that apogee of literary modernism James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Audiences seemed to grasp and respect the expressive logic of why Stravinsky had needed to take musical language back to first base. *Ulysses*

is still considered 'difficult', but *The Rite* was quickly sucked into the mainstream. Bernard Herrmann's score for Hitchcock's *Psycho* and John Williams's schlock-horror *Jaws* motif could never have existed without it. In *Fantasia* – Disney's 1940 animated film choreographed to classical music – *The Rite*, albeit in a precised Mickey Mouse reorchestration, sat seamlessly alongside Dukas's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony and Mussorgsky's *A Night on the Bare Mountain* as a culturally entrenched 'classic' in a way that, for argument's sake, music by the more awkward squad Schoenberg could not. To the man on the street, Stravinsky personified new-music exotica. But such dalliances with the mainstream actually tell us little about how *The Rite* came to leave its indelible imprint on the harmonic, melodic and rhythmic thinking of the music that came after it – on Messiaen and Varèse; Xenakis and Boulez; Andriessen and Reich; Charlie Parker and Frank Zappa.

So how did Stravinsky's ballet charm the mainstream while becoming the most influential and analysed score of the 20th century? As a first case study I give you Aaron Copland, who, despite coming of age in Brooklyn during the first two decades of the 20th century, found a workable way of incorporating folklore into his music through his experience of Stravinsky, and of *The Rite of Spring* in particular. In 1921, Copland relocated to France. He had enrolled at the American Music School in Fontainebleau, where his teacher was Nadia Boulanger, Stravinsky's close friend and confidante. If *The Rite* (and its precursors *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*) were motivated by a desire to understand more about the folk origins of the Russian people, Copland's trilogy of classic ballets applied this Stravinskian concept of 'invented' folklore to his American situation. Written in 1934, *Hear Ye! Hear Ye!* attempted to 'do' black jazz, but ended up linking together idiomatic clichés. But *Billy the Kid*, *Rodeo* and *Appalachian Spring* implanted folk sources at a deep structural level, Copland's trademark open-fifth prairie sound framing the space and invoking an imagined landscape, part real and part fantasy, every bit as powerfully as *The Rite*'s curtain-raising bassoon solo.

Even at its most Stravinskian – the finale of Copland's Piano Concerto is practically traced over *The Rite*'s 'Sacrificial Dance'; the lopsided rhythmic impetus of *El salón México* is *The Rite* going *olé* in a sombrero – there's a liberated (and liberating) sense of Stravinsky distilled but never imitated. Adding to the Copland–Stravinsky intrigue is the little-discussed aside that Stravinsky managed to inspire not only these nationalist scores, but also modernist pieces like Copland's stentorian 1930 *Piano Variations*, a vein he revived during the 1960s as his compositional career was drawing to a close with the orchestral works *Comnotations* and *Inscape*. The gestural



Aaron Copland: folklore fuelled his ballets

reliance that the Piano Concerto and *El salón México* have on *The Rite* – an overlay of polyrhythmic ideas, the anti-groove of alternating time signatures – is clear enough, technical hooks that also audibly filtered into the splintering motor rhythms of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* and Seventh Piano Sonata. But if the trail might feel like it's running cold with Copland's late modernist pieces, consider this. *Connotations* and *Inscape* are parched, aloof, sonically brittle orchestral rituals. In Copland's early nationalist ballets, melodic motifs were developed by way of subtle rhythmic and harmonic shifts of emphasis, a technique with obvious pedigree in *The Rite*. The late modernist works retain this basic compositional technique, the stylistic differential coming from the unstable harmonic underpinning and the disorientating chromatic harmony. Stravinsky ran through Copland's DNA. Aaron couldn't shake off Igor, and never wanted to.

Carl Orff, case study number two, is the exemplar par excellence of what can go wrong when a composer cherry-picks from the surface of *The Rite* without engaging sincerely with Stravinsky's underlying aesthetic. Can that much-loved cantata *Carmina burana* – Orff's 1936 celebration of vainglorious youth culture that found sympathy with the Nazi regime and has latterly been used to open a certain Saturday night television pop talent show – really be said to have 'gone wrong'? Well, one man's innocent spectacle is another's blemished bombast, and separating the notes on the page from the surrounding ideology is always a challenge when discussing Orff's uncertain legacy. But where



Carl Orff: pilfered *The Rite's* primitivism

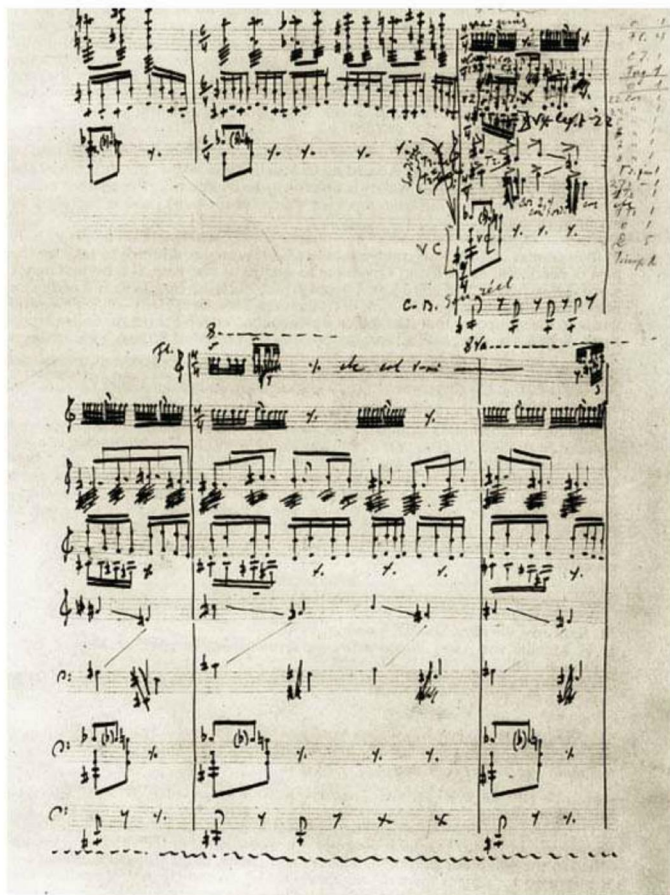
Copland embellished and grew Stravinsky's influence, there are enough explicitly musical reasons to suggest that Orff simply exploited it.

Musical 'primitivism' is a troubling and disingenuous concept when applied, as it is habitually, to *The Rite of Spring*. Writing music that sounded so feral and untamed required a level of orchestral fastidiousness and harmonic nerves of steel that pushed Stravinsky to his limit. *The Rite* portrays a state of primitivism. But *Carmina burana's* heavy-handed orchestration and gallery-playing harmonic shock tactics really are crude and basic. Compositionally, the music does away with counterpoint; it marches through time by way of directional blocks that are repeated rather than developed. Orff reduces his harmonic palette to thirds, fifths, unisons and octaves, the base primary colours of harmony. Stravinskian bitonality is downgraded to the level of 'wrong note' harmony: effect, never function. *Rite*-like

motor rhythms fuel Orff's anthemic emotional manipulation. A music of integrity with no counterpoint and harmonised in octaves, thirds and fifths might easily exist – but this isn't it. Put Orff's desire to deny the complexity of modern life into its historical context, and *Carmina burana* hardly comes up smelling of roses.

Roger Reynolds, the West Coast American composer whose ritualistic scores have often been placed in a lineage that reaches back to Varèse and Xenakis, and therefore to Stravinsky, tells me he hears three aspects within *The Rite* that have been most influential: 'primal evocation, rhythmic angularity, and what sometimes feel like sonic "walls" – majestic blocks of complex sonority suggestive of an unknown world'. As he explains: 'The feature most referenced is, of course, the diabolical rhythmic mayhem of the "Danse sacrée"'. If one considers its impact even upon Varèse's *Arcana*, one can hear both the rhythmic savagery, and this sense of primal evocation – in fact, the evocative voice of the conjuror became an almost inevitable opening gambit for Varèse.'

Working towards specifics, what features of *The Rite* have impacted most deeply on Reynolds's own work? 'It is the two non-rhythmic features of *The Rite* that impressed me most strongly,' he explains, 'the ways in which Stravinsky summons into being musical "spaces" hitherto unimagined. The opening wailing of the bassoon spirals out to other sections of the orchestra immersing us in the "place" in which the ceremony to follow will occur. But there are several other points in the work when other, unanticipated spaces – a new and previously unknown musical viscosity – fills the air, placing the dancers and us in a metaphorical space that no other music had, or has since.' Reynolds's



A page of Stravinsky's handwritten score of *The Rite of Spring*

'Where Copland embellished and grew Stravinsky's influence, Orff simply exploited it'

neat little analysis rhymes with words of Stravinsky's own from his 1962 book of conversations with Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments*. 'A new piece of music is a new reality,' he claimed, which suggested that *The Rite* could be an open invitation to subsequent composers to imagine equally fantastical fresh musical terrain, which, if true, lands us inside the mother of all paradoxes. Although Stravinsky continued to feed off *The Rite's* sound world and compositional techniques for a few more years – *Three Pieces for String Quartet*, *The Soldier's Tale* and *Les noces* are all identifiably 'Riteian') – by the time of *Pulcinella* and *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* in 1920, new compositional concerns

RESPONDING TO THE RITE



Esa-Pekka Salonen

Conductor

It has this amazing and mysterious freshness to it. I wish I knew why. If I did, I'd be consulting composers worldwide on the subject of longevity! But I don't. What I do feel, though, is that only a few

pieces in the canon have the same sort of vitality, and all these are breakthrough works that seemingly came out of nowhere, with no existing models. So *Eroica* would be one, *Symphonie fantastique* another, and also *Sacre*. It has to do with the lack of history, precedence and models. Although we know that Berlioz was fascinated by Beethoven's symphonies No 2 and No 7 when he wrote the *Symphonie fantastique*, (if anything) there are only very distant echoes of these pieces in that work. With Stravinsky, we know where he was coming from, but the leap from *Petrushka* to this is like Bob Beamon in the 1968 Olympics jumping 8.9m (a sort of freak long jump) – in one go exceeding the previous world record by 55cm. The *Sacre* similarly came out of nowhere, and changed everything.

Does it being a ballet affect the way I perform it? I think it's important to know the subject matter – it helps; and you shouldn't treat it as a piece of absolute music because it isn't and wasn't meant to be. Also, there's no development, no symphonic shape as such, so it's not like conducting a Mahler or a Brahms symphony, where you're in charge of the narrative. In the *Sacre* you kind of enable the narrative but you're not in charge of it; you basically give the orchestra the tools to handle it – you can't do any funny stuff with it. Or you can, but it's pointless, because if you just make sure that the machine works faultlessly, then this particular machine produces a scary and very moving thing on its own. But you have to know what images it needs to convey in order to enable it.

Sacre is loved by many, with generation after generation getting their kicks from it. A lot of the so-called groundbreaking modernist stuff written in the 1910s and '20s is almost forgotten, and when we talk about it we're mostly respectful and reverential, but it's not the kind of music that you miss when you don't hear it. Whereas I know lots of people who have to get their *Sacre* fix otherwise they go bonkers – if ever there was a mark of a masterpiece, that's it!



Rachel Gough

Principal bassoon, LSO

With the opening solo, it's the psychological aspect that's most difficult. For Stravinsky to use a solo bassoon in that high register defied all conventions, so the sound was probably unidentifiable to his audiences. Today, concert-goers swivel round to the principal-bassoon seat in anticipation – which is daunting!

Because of the solo's high register, you need the perfect reed, and there can't be any water in any of the keys because the notes may not speak properly. The highest note is top D; all modern bassoons have a top D key to make the note sound more easily, but my 1940s instrument doesn't have one! Playing into silence is another challenge – in rehearsals you rarely get complete quiet before you start to play.

It's been said that Stravinsky wanted the solo to sound strained and dangerous, but apparently he was influenced by the *dudka*, an ancient reed instrument, which may suggest that he was after a mysterious sound. I personally try to make the opening sound quite fragile rather than assertive or fully fledged, but some conductors prefer a firm start.

I'm still in awe of *The Rite* – there's so much to discover each time I play it, and I still have to count like hell! Its rhythmic vibrancy draws you in, so you get caught up in its energy. My best performance was with Chailly, when I was 36 weeks pregnant. Somehow the situation seemed so ludicrous that I had no fear and felt I had nothing to lose.



Simon Rattle

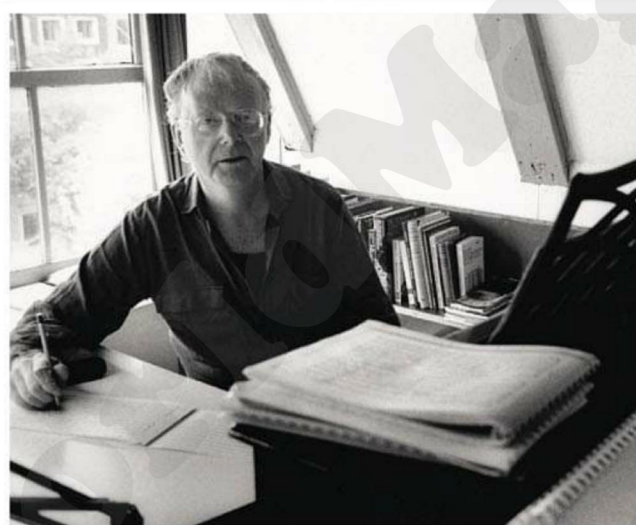
Conductor

The Rite was once hard to play, but now it's in danger of becoming an orchestral showpiece because people know and play it so well. There was a time when, basically, Markevitch and Frühbeck were the ones who could really conduct it and train orchestras to play it. The biggest challenge is to keep it in proportion: not to make it just a series of bright colours, but to maintain the story and keep it coming out of the earth.

I'm sure that if Stravinsky wrote the bassoon solo now, he'd start it on a top E flat, not a C. He would want it to be even more dangerous.

were in the ascendant that would ultimately lead him towards the dainty neo-classicism of the *Serenade in A* and *Dumbarton Oaks*. There was no future in reducing *The Rite*'s vocabulary to a catalogue of effects and apply-when-ready compositional tricks; Stravinsky knew the dangers. In 1913, *The Rite* had marked a clean break from the Austro-German tradition, but just as Stravinsky was moving his language on again, *Rite of Spring*-isms became the new orthodoxy. Just think of all those second-tier French divertimentos with cute bitonal first movements; just think of all those American symphonic *scherzos* (1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1-2-BAM!).

And the problem boils down to harmony. That most famous quote of all from Stravinsky's autobiography – 'music is powerless to express anything', an endlessly problematic and misunderstood phrase – is very much the point. The distinction Stravinsky made between his aesthetic and more mimetic modes of expression was that his music definitely did stand on ceremony. Stylised ceremony, Stravinsky thought, reconnected us with universal, fundamental truths in a way that personalised expression could not. But here's the paradox: music that consciously borrowed surface gestures from *The Rite* in an effort to sound 'modern' repurposed them as a representational image.



Louis Andriessen: inspired by *The Rite of Spring*'s rhythm and orchestration

The 8th Osaka International Chamber Music Competition & Festa

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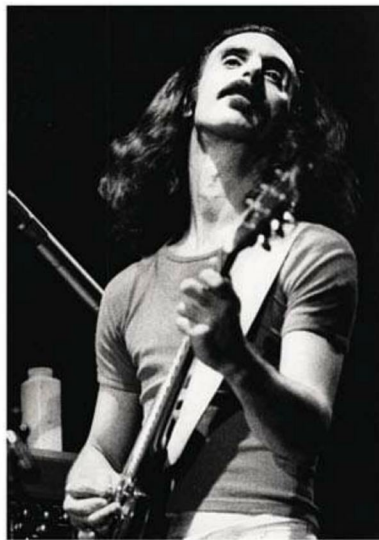
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Stravinsky's radical, fascinating rhythm and his wacky orchestration – the bassoon solo, the bumping and grinding percussion, the orchestral thumps – are the work's headlining innovations, but a deeper mystery lies at *The Rite's* core. Although Stravinsky regularly played fast and loose with the truth, by common agreement there are at least nine melodic motifs within *The Rite* that can be traced directly back to a folk source. One of these motifs was catchy enough for Charlie Parker to drop it into the solo of his 1950 record *Repetition*, but it's Stravinsky's harmony that lends these melodic shards their overarching power – what keeps *The Rite* turning on its enigmatic axis is the Yin–Yang tension between the direct sting of Stravinsky's melodic material and his illusive chromatic side-stepping harmony.

Nowhere has the influence been more pronounced than in Holland, where at least two generations of composers have eagerly followed the senior Dutch composer Louis Andriessen in writing music that spills out of *The Rite's* rhythmic push and muscular orchestration. Listening to Andriessen's 1976 *De staat* is like being locked inside *The Rite's* inner mechanisms; but as far as the Dutch new-music scene is concerned, there are those who think that this Stravinsky fixation has led to a national school where one composer sounds interchangeable with another – a scene every bit as ideologically narrow as the serialism it sought to replace. Xenakis's *Eonta*, Messiaen's *From the Canyons to the Stars*, Reich's *Drumming*, Glass's *Music in Twelve Parts* and Ligeti's *Lontano* are all children of Stravinsky's rhythmic ideas, original ideas about harmony applied. As today's modern composition scene becomes increasingly fragmentary, traces of *The Rite* become secreted within a fabric of other influences. Michael Gordon's 2002 *Decasia* added microtonal inflections to a broadly *Rite*-thinking rhythmic palette – another way to refresh the harmonic thinking. Whether Xenakis or Gordon, every composer engaging with *The Rite* needs to get excited about the possibility that music could never be the same again. And there are no exceptions. **G**



Zappa: his Amnesia vivace quotes from *The Rite*

EXPERIENCING THE RITE IN 2013



Every major concert hall is hosting *The Rite of Spring*. But for something a bit different, read on...

Rite@100

Carolina Performing Arts, University of North Carolina
'Rite@100' started in September 2012 and continues until May. Highlights include the Joffrey Ballet performing the literal re-creation of the 1913 ballet (**March 23 & 24**) and a new work by dancer Medhi Walerski and composer Joby Talbot (**April 3**). There's also a remount of Martha Graham's version of *The Rite of Spring* (pictured) (**April 26 & 27**), which premiered in 1984 and hasn't been seen for a decade. theriteofspringat100.org

Budapest Spring Festival

Béla Bartók National Concert Hall, Budapest

On **April 3**, choreographer and director Klaus Obermaier explores *The Rite of Spring* with a futuristic production that's not for the faint-hearted. As Obermaier says, 'The technology is very similar to [the 3D film] *Avatar*, but there are no pre-recorded images: it's all happening live.'

A String of Rites

Sadler's Wells, London

Three works reinterpret Stravinsky's 20th-century masterpiece for the 21st century. First up is *ITMOi (in The Mind Of Igor)* (**May 28 – June 1**), a work for 12 dancers with an original score by Nitin Sawhney, Jocelyn Pook and Ben Frost. By contrast, Michael Keegan-Dolan's *The Rite of Spring* (**April 11-13**) uses Stravinsky's original score (performed here by piano duet). The final work is *RIOT Offspring* (**June 8**) for 80 non-professionals including The Company of Elders. sadlerswells.com

Virginia SO / Falletta

Chrysler Hall, Norfolk, Virginia

JoAnn Falletta directs the Virginia Symphony Orchestra and Richmond Ballet in the 1993 version of *The Rite of Spring* by Salvatore Aiello (**May 29**). The evening starts with famed Stravinsky/Balanchine masterwork *Duo Concertante*. vafest.org.

Gil Shaham / Tilson Thomas

Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco

Michael Tilson Thomas's passion for Stravinsky's music began when he met the composer at USC. In this all-Stravinsky programme (**June 19 & 20**) from San Francisco Symphony, the conductor shares the stage with violinist Gil Shaham to perform the Violin Concerto, *Agon* and, of course, *The Rite of Spring*.

sfsymphony.org

RITE-INSPIRED TRACKS TO EXPLORE

Copland: Piano Concerto
Benjamin Pasternack *pf*
Elgin Symphony Orchestra
/ Robert Hanson

Naxos © 8 559297 (A/O8)

Copland's 1926 Piano Concerto fuses jazz energies with *Rite*-sized gestures.

Orff: Carmina burana
Sheila Armstrong *sop*
Gerald English *ten*
Thomas Allen *bar*

London Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / André Previn

EMI Classics © 678704-2 (10/75)

Rite-lite; right popular.

Recorded in London in 1974.



Reynolds: 'Whispers out of Time'
Cleveland Chamber
Symphony / Edwin

London; La Jolla SO / Harvey Sollberger; Tokyo PO / Kotaro Sato

Mode © 183

Orchestral works, written in 1987-90,

which rise to Stravinsky's challenges.



Andriessen: De staat
Synergy Vocals; London
Sinfonietta / David Atherton
Signum Classics

© SIGCD273 (2/12)

Andriessen's early '70s classic gorging on *Rite*-like rhythms and harmonies.

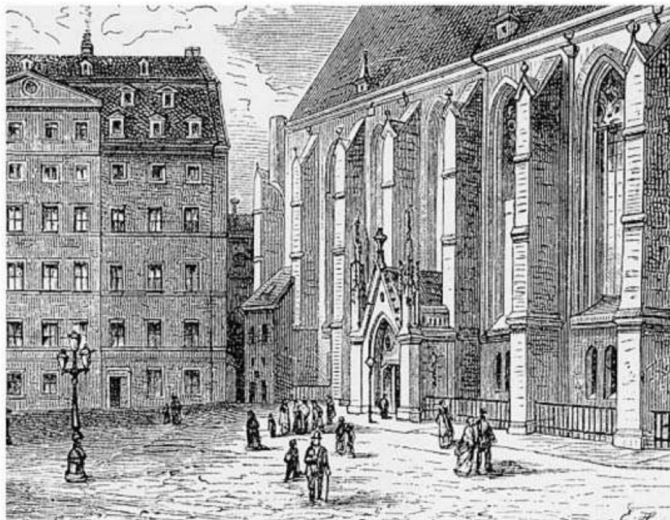


A Passion of Bach's time

As the Dunedin Consort record Bach's *St John Passion* in the context of a Good Friday vespers, David Vickers speaks to John Butt and others about the rewards of liturgical reconstruction

The Dunedin Consort's new Linn recording of Bach's *St John Passion* aims to reconstruct the complete Good Friday vespers service as it might have been celebrated during Bach's tenure as Thomaskantor. Upon my arrival at Edinburgh's historic Greyfriars Kirk, about an hour before the first session is due to start, music director John Butt is practising the various organ pieces he's chosen to include in his reconstruction (four of Bach's chorale preludes and an extract from a prelude by Buxtehude). The walls of the almost-empty church vibrate while Linn producer Philip Hobbs and assistant engineer Robert Cammidge rush about finalising the set-up, cheerfully bemoaning the fact that 'the whole morning has just evaporated!' Butt descends from the organ loft, chuckling not only at the challenge ahead, but also because he's had to learn to play these fiendish organ pieces transposed down a semitone to match the Dunedin players' Baroque tuning. He explains that he decided against recording the organ pieces elsewhere or using digital jiggery-pokery to adjust the pitch artificially because he wanted all the music to be created organically in the same space. He adds, 'I've decided not to include tolling bells at the start of the recording, as if calling to worship the faithful Leipzigers – actually, I'm not sure we can get any, nor if they rang the bells on Good Friday anyway.'

During our discussion about piecing together a correct liturgy for Bach's piece, I ask Butt if he's using the original 1724 version, the considerably revised 1725 version or the composer's final 1749 text – or a conflation of all three. The answer surprises me: 'We deliberately decided to base our performance on the version Bach planned to perform on Good Friday 1739, but which he abandoned – we're quite knowingly reconstructing an occasion that never happened, so nobody can criticise us for getting it wrong! In terms of Bach's music, it's almost identical to 1724 but with the viola d'amore parts in "Betrachte, meine Seele" and "Erwäge" replaced by muted violins.' Congregational chorales from Gottfried Vopelius's *Neu Leipziger Gesangbuch* (1682) are sung unaccompanied and in unison by a chorus of local volunteers. Butt explains: 'The large organ only plays in the preludes, and does not play in the hymns. There was a stark Calvinist style of congregational singing – and one of the things we wanted to do was to show that Bach's chorale harmonisations in the Passion are nothing like what the congregation actually sang elsewhere during the service.' Some of the chorale verses are sung in simple harmonised form by the University of Glasgow Chapel Choir conducted by James Grossmith, who also perform Jacobus Handl's Passiontide motet *Ecce quomodo moritur justus*



Clockwise, from far left:
the Dunedin Consort
recording in Greyfriars
Kirk, Edinburgh;
St Thomas's Church
and school, Leipzig;
first page of the final
congregational chorale
'Nun danket alle Gott';
Erdmann Neumeister,
whose sermon is
available as a free
download from Linn



immediately after the conclusion to the Passion. Butt enthuses: 'One of the things I wanted to do in this recording was to reflect on the notion of three specific levels of singing found in Bach's school and church environment. Everybody sings the chorales in unison, and then the next level is to sing in an old-fashioned harmonised motet style (thus moving towards the harmonised chorale, but also back towards the traditional motet genres of the 16th century). The third level is the specialist performance of Bach's own "modern" music by highly trained concertists and ripienists. I hope it will help clarify a few aspects of the continuing debate about Bach's choir and his deployment of singers.'

The Dunedin Consort's recording will no doubt send some listeners scurrying for the secularised comfort of a traditional concert-hall performance. Nevertheless, the convivial Butt remarks, 'While it's now perfectly normal to stage operatic dramatisations of the Passions, no one has seemed interested in what a liturgical setting might reveal about these works! Over the last century or so there's been a squeamishness about religion – an interesting conflict between the religion of the church and the religion of "great musical art". Putting the *St John Passion* into a liturgical context gives us a new insight into a piece that has customarily been assimilated into the later notion of an "autonomous musical work".'

Inevitably, experiments such as Butt's which attempt to contextualise sacred music through authentic liturgical constructions don't all achieve perfect equilibrium in their fusion of creative programming and academic rigour. Moreover, not everyone undertaking 'liturgical reconstruction' shares identical aesthetic priorities and approaches. However, it's astonishing that reconstructions placing Bach's church music into

historically informed liturgical sequences have seldom been commercially recorded. In the late 1990s, Paul McCreesh masterminded a reconstruction of an Epiphany Mass as it might have been celebrated at St Thomas's in Leipzig c1740, but no other recording has attempted to reveal a sacred work of Bach in its original context until now.

CONFRONTING BACH'S MUSIC

Butt's interest in the venture was sparked by Robin Leaver, a former cleric-turned-musicologist who says, 'Reconstructions of liturgical context need to have integrity and not come across as play-acting at worship.' Leaver contributed to Butt's *Cambridge Companion to Bach*, and the two respected scholars have collaborated again on the Linn recording. Leaver's useful advice included the recommendation of a sermon published in 1720 by Erdmann Neumeister, the author of several cantata texts set by Bach; his sermon about Jesus overcoming death and bringing

life and immortality to light through the Gospel fits the liturgy perfectly in the absence of any authentic Leipzig options. The faint-hearted will be spared the 40-minute sermon on CD because Linn is offering it as a free bonus download – along with

some of the other bits of the Lutheran Vespers that would have occurred between the two parts of the Passion.

Butt believes that potentially useful outcomes outweigh any possible disadvantages of the experiment: 'Putting Bach back in his own religious context runs the risk of making his music less relevant to a wider audience; but there have been increasingly heated debates, both within academia and within broader culture, about what the concept of "the work" really means and about why classical music should be privileged above other

'We're quite knowingly reconstructing an occasion that never happened, so nobody can criticise us for getting it wrong!' – John Butt

genres. So we're forced to confront what Bach's music actually is, and what it can do. There certainly isn't only one way of doing it, but perhaps trying it out in its original context reinvents elements of human experience that have rolled out of sight over time. To my mind, hearing Bach's music within a broader event-based context, far from diluting it and rendering it subservient to a less remarkable sequence of music and words, actually makes it sound even more extraordinary.'

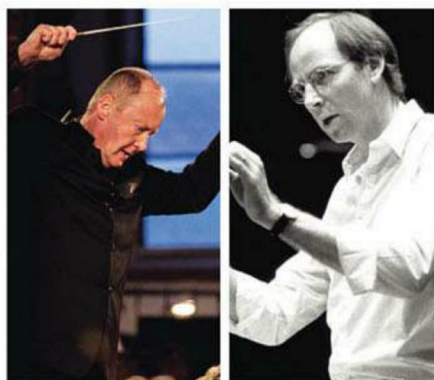
RESURRECTION OF THE RECONSTRUCTION

The appearance of Butt's *St John Passion* confirms that recordings of liturgical reconstructions are making a modest comeback. Last year two high-profile examples celebrated the 400th anniversary of Giovanni Gabrieli's death: I Fagiolini combined radical new editions of Gabrieli's largest-scale music with Viadana's psalms for their '1612 Italian Vespers' (Decca), and the Gabrieli Consort & Players with McCreesh revisited (on Winged Lion) their 'Venetian Coronation 1595'. McCreesh has recorded more liturgical reconstructions exploring Renaissance and Baroque sacred music than any other artist, but he explains that his interest was twofold: 'I was interested in looking at how the actual liturgy developed as a constructed art form in its own right. But also, having experienced concerts and recordings featuring bleeding chunks of motets and bits of masses, it seemed to me that there was potentially something valuable to be gained in considering Renaissance polyphony as part of a greater whole. Mind you, it's also a programming tool: most pieces of early music are a maximum of seven minutes long, so I used liturgical reconstruction quite crudely as a marketable concept on which to hang them.'

McCreesh talks candidly about balancing commercial appeal, academic rigour and creative musicianship. 'Most reconstructions aren't really interested in meticulously recreating liturgies for their own sake, and some recordings are falsely peddled as liturgical reconstructions. I get frustrated by sloppy imitators who forsake scholarly rigour in favour of a scratch-n-sniff invented liturgy.' McCreesh's own projects are usually collaborations with musicologists. 'I haven't spent much time myself in libraries digging into obscure forms of liturgy, apart from the research I did for our first one [*Gramophone* Award-winning 'A Venetian Coronation 1595' on Virgin], but perhaps I've spent too much time trying to get some of the small points right. Nowadays I don't think anybody gives a monkeys if the small details are perfect. Another problem is that I always gild the lily, and use any excuse to cram in the highest-possible number of the best-possible pieces. I'd say that our Praetorius Christmas Mass borders on the over-symphonic and has a bit too much music in it – but everybody seems to love it! People tell me it's become part of their Christmas Day ritual, and a priest friend of mine said, "When I listen to it, I think I've died and gone to heaven." To this day it remains our best-selling album by a mile.'

The usefulness of contextual formats for concerts of liturgical music can't be underestimated. Robert King reveals that his elaborate recreation of the 1727 coronation of George II had its unlikely genesis on a Boeing 747 with Crispian Steele-Perkins, but the live show is the King's Consort's most widely toured large-scale project. 'It's testament to audiences wanting to experience more than just musical works performed statically,' he suggests. 'It's amazing to witness the excitement of an audience as they hear drummers starting up, out of earshot, and to see heads turning as they realise there's a big procession coming past them. Some of our musicians have done the coronation more than 40 times but still get excited by it. But, as with all spectacles, it doesn't always go smoothly. At the BBC Proms I insisted that the processions come right through the arena, and then physically had to lift an attendant out of the way as she tried to stop us: she thought we were gatecrashers!'

Robert Hollingworth's first close encounter with liturgical reconstruction was singing in Schola Gregoriana's performance of



Clockwise, from top: The harpsichord of John Butt, the Dunedins' music director; the man himself, who says that 'hearing Bach's music within a broader context makes it sound even more extraordinary'; Andrew Parrott and Paul McCreesh, both directors of many liturgical reconstructions

'I get frustrated by sloppy imitators who forsake scholarly rigour in favour of scratch-n-sniff invented liturgy' – Paul McCreesh

a Mass by Machaut directed by the late Mary Berry. He says: 'The lovely thing that feels so purely right on a musical level, quite apart from any kind of liturgical correctness, is when plainchant is added to polyphonic music: the chant acts as a musical sorbet; it cleanses your palette between the large, rich helpings of polyphony.' Andrew Parrott agrees that the liturgical approach to performing Renaissance polyphony 'makes sense of it. If you have a banquet, you have interludes between the courses – you don't go right from one rich course to another. Musical feasts also need to have that sort of architecture. What I've learnt is that liturgies for a Machaut Mass or Monteverdi's 1610 Vespers are musical pictures that possess a sort of pattern; they're not concert pieces, ending with a big climax, having had a drinks interval between two halves.

Those liturgies were designed to offer a more extended shape, with space and pacing, and they wind down to a gentler end.'

Parrott is both amused and exasperated that nearly 30 years after his liturgical recording of Monteverdi's Vespers one critic (not one of ours!) recently derided his approach as 'trying to make it into Monteverdi's Flying Circus'. Parrott drily retorts, 'To me, that label applies better to some of those versions I've heard which go through the publication in strict order as if it's a concert piece, devoid of any reference to the framework into which the music would have been put.' Several decades on from a series of groundbreaking liturgical reconstructions recorded for EMI (some never reissued), Parrott still has misgivings about performing some church music without context: 'I don't want to perform a polyphonic Renaissance Mass such as Taverner's *Missa Gloria tibi Trinitas* as if it never had that sort of context, because you lose the pacing, sense of



architecture and everything that gave birth to that piece of music. Also, there's a problem in performing the *Gloria* and *Credo* consecutively: not only do you get musical indigestion, but also their sharing of thematic material becomes tautological.'

Hollingworth agrees, adding: 'The very entity that unifies a polyphonic Mass over the course of a church service is what makes it bad to listen to the *Kyrie*, the *Gloria*, the *Credo*, the 'Benedictus' and the *Agnus Dei* all together in one lump. Think of a parody Mass where all the movements are based on the same thematic material, harmonic progressions and melodic shapes of a particular motet – over the course of an hour's church service, that unity draws those things together, it connects the *Agnus Dei* to the *Kyrie*, and in between you have the priest talking, plainchant and so on. If you instead listen to all those close together, all those unities become repetitive, and, dare I say it, boring. Listening, therefore, to an entire recording of a Mass just doesn't work. I love some of the Tallis Scholars' recordings of Masses and related motets, but I can rarely listen to them all in one go.'

IN PURSUIT OF REALISM

Hollingworth points out that liturgical reconstruction requires 'an inordinate amount of painstaking research' to work out what might be the right plainchant to use. For the '1612 Italian Vespers' he was ably abetted by musicologist and former Radio 3 producer Hugh Keyte, who was closely involved in numerous seminal projects conducted by Parrott during the 1980s. Keyte observes that many pioneering liturgical reconstructions were radio broadcasts that never made it on to CD. He mentions an elaborate Easter Day Vespers as it might have been done at the main church in Munich in the time of Lassus, and a live Ascension Day Mass as it might have been celebrated in Leipzig during Bach's time: 'I seem to remember that every jot and tittle was included, with only one

disappointing feature: a modern sermon by an East German Lutheran bishop, during which, like most listeners, I had lunch.'

Keyte's enthusiasm for the pursuit of realism entered uncharted territory when he worked on the Taverner Choir, Consort and Players' speculative reconstruction of a solemn Mass as it might have been celebrated at St Mark's on November 21, 1631, after the delivery of Venice from the Plague (entitled *Mass of Thanksgiving*). 'I searched the world for an expert on cannon fire,' he explains. 'I found an eccentric Italian professor who knew exactly what to do, and even told me exactly which kind of firework to use that reproduced 16th-century Venetian cannon! But when it came to it, the producer made them so quiet that you can hardly hear the damn things – I suppose that's what it would've sounded like had you been inside the thick walls of St Mark's Basilica!' Parrott evaluates, 'We may have got things wrong about the exact liturgy or the occasions on which specific pieces were used, but I don't claim to recreate the exact liturgical events of history. What I do try to recreate is a plausible context in which music could have happened. There was a lot of conjecture about the way we placed music by Monteverdi into the *Mass of Thanksgiving*, or Handel's Latin church music into the *Carmelite Vespers*, and I'm sure a lot of it was wrong. The original booklet-notes were always careful to make the hypothetical aspects and scholarly riddles abundantly clear to the attentive reader. But even if I may have created an artificial context, or we may have gone too far with the noise of footsteps or something like that, or tested people's patience by distorting certain elements to replace the lack of visual spectacle, the basic principle is that we provided a context as opposed to no context.'

Everyone I interview adamantly supports different ways in which sacred music can be conveyed effectively to modern audiences, and the fact that some half-baked mismatches of music with inappropriate liturgy do little good. McCreesh admits, 'I'm not sure that the concept isn't nowadays regarded as somehow passé. I haven't performed any entirely new reconstructions for about 15 years, and I'm not really interested in doing them that much anymore, but sometimes I get the odd itch to try out some ideas that haven't been done before, and which I'd pursue gladly if somebody was to donate to the Gabrieli a large cheque to pay somebody else to do the scholarship! But if somebody were to suggest we try doing a Maundy Thursday service as it might have been done in some backwater Viennese church, with music that's rubbish, then I would run a mile.'

► To read Gramophone's review of the Dunedin's St John Passion, turn to page 42

SIX RECONSTRUCTIONS TO EXPLORE



Taverner
Missa Gloria tibi Trinitas
Taverner Choir / Parrott
EMI © CDC749103-2 (hla)

Hard-to-find disc of polyphony in the context of High Mass for Trinity Sunday at Cardinal College, Oxford.



Praetorius et al Mass for Christmas Morning
Gabrieli Consort & Players / McCreesh

Archiv © 439 250-2AH (12/94)
As possibly celebrated in a major German church c1620. Recorded 1994.



Guerrero Requiem
Orchestra of the Renaissance / Noone
Glossa © GCD921402 (3/00)

How Guerrero's own Requiem might have been sung at his own funeral in Seville in 1599 – 400 years on, in 1999.



Monteverdi
Mass of Thanksgiving
Taverner Consort et al / Parrott

Virgin Veritas © 2 349 9932 (11/89R)
1989 recording rightly praised as 'very special and enriching' (Tess Knighton).



Du Caurroy
Requiem des Rois de France
Douce Mémoire / Raisin-Dadre
Naïve © E8922 (A/99)

A compelling evocation of music for the funeral in 1610 of Henri IV of France.



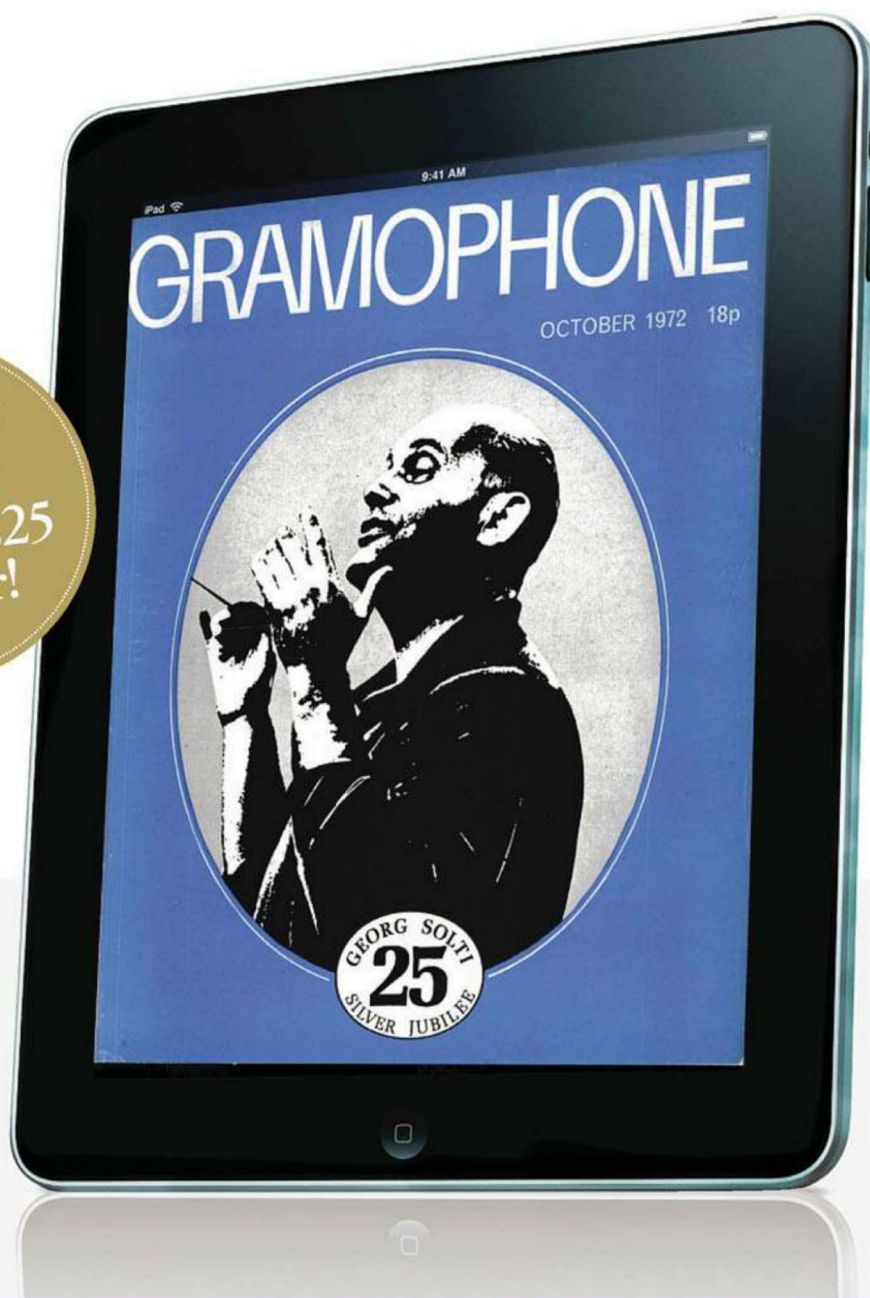
Vivaldi Vespers for the Feast of the Assumption
Concerto Italiano / Alessandrini
Naïve © 2 30383 (12/03)

Putative vehicle (from 2003) for works unconnected by date or occasion.

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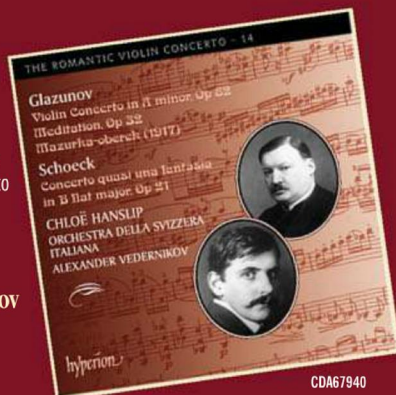
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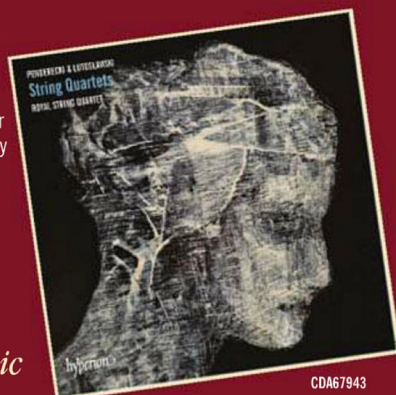
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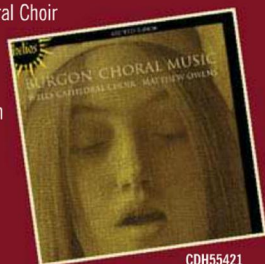
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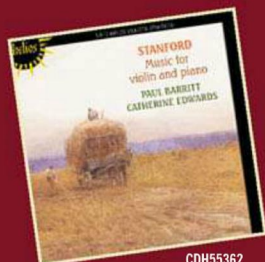
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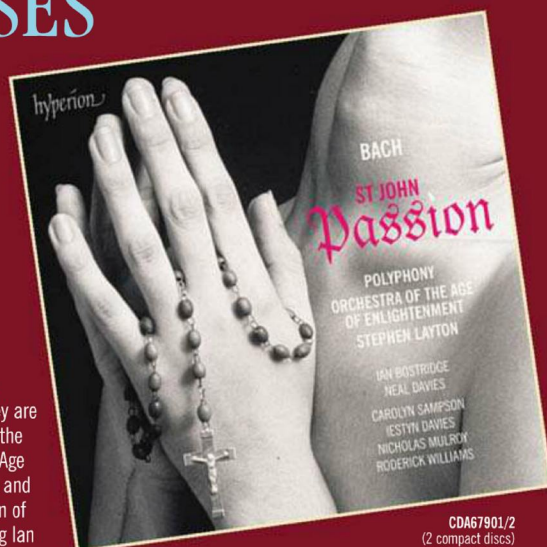
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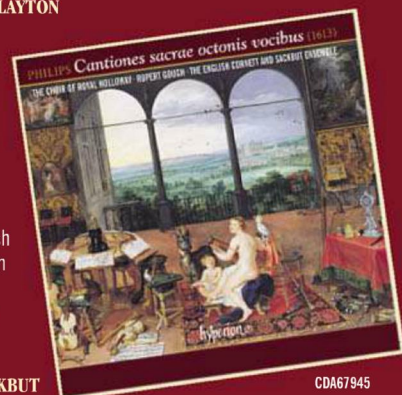
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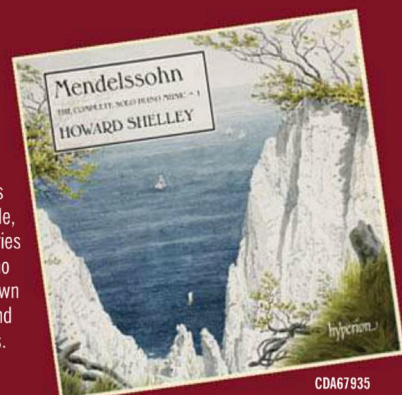
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March 2013



Dvořák on Sony: Teo Gheorghiu and the Carmina Quartet record the Second Piano Quintet ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 58](#)

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GRAMOPHONE *Reviewers*



David Patrick Stearns

Where I'm from, classical music is a means of clandestine rebellion. My family was baffled and annoyed when – in Sycamore, Illinois, nestled in the cornfields between Chicago and Iowa – I acquired my first opera album aged 12. At 16, I claimed the family car supposedly for sporting events but drove to Chicago to hear Solti. When the Boulez recording of *Pelléas* turned up at the public library, I was home – particularly identifying with characters who didn't know where they were or what they doing there.

During my first newspaper job in the 1970s, the public library was full of Russian opera. The recently emigrated Galina Vishnevskaya gave a sparsely

attended but life-changing recital that revealed the possibilities of dramatic truth as conveyed by the human voice. I did whatever was necessary to hear what I needed to hear. I bribed ushers. I masqueraded as a chorister and sight-sang Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony under Leonard Bernstein.

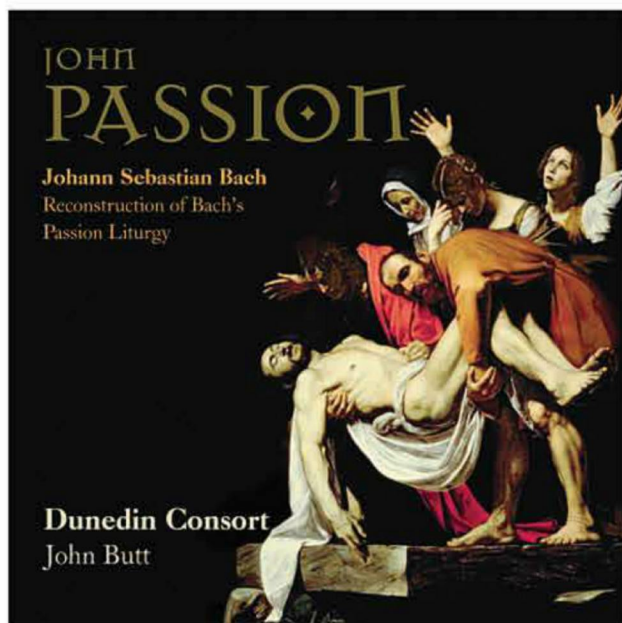
Though my dramatic truth now comes from the likes of mezzo-soprano Christianne Stotijn and baritone Henk Neven, anything on a compact disc is a potential professional obligation. So my private experiences are with LPs that have been passed over by the digital era. I know little about the great, long-gone Droic String Quartet. But its recordings are like family.

Andrew Achenbach
Nalen Anthoni
Mike Ashman
Phillip Clark
Rob Cowan*
Jeremy Dibble
Peter Dickinson
Jed Distler
Duncan Druce
Adrian Edwards
Richard Fairman
David Fallows
David Fanning
Iain Fenlon
Fabrice Fitch
Jonathan Freeman-Attwood
Caroline Gill
Edward Greenfield
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David Patrick Stearns
David Threasher
David Vickers
John Warrack
Richard Whitehouse
Arnold Whittall
Richard Wigmore
William Yeoman

* Contributing Editor

Recording of the Month



'Naturalness and emotional honesty are what emerge from this tight-knit and perfectly paced ensemble Passion'

Lindsay Kemp is enthralled by a contextualised recording of Bach's St John Passion

JS Bach

JS Bach *St John Passion*, BWV245, interspersed with *Da Jesus an dem Kreuze stund*, BWV621. *O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig*, BWV618. *Christus, der uns selig macht*, BWV620. Nun danket alle Gott, BWV657 *Buxtehude* Praeludium, BuxWV146 *Handl* *Ecce quomodo moritur* **Matthew Brook** *bar* **Christus** **Nicholas Mulroy** *ten* Evangelist **Joanne Lunn** *sop* **Clare Wilkinson** *contr* **Robert Davies** *bar* **University of Glasgow Chapel Choir** / **James Grossmith**; **Dunedin Consort** / **John Butt** Linn ® ② CKD419 (139' • DDD/DSD)

Bach's *St John Passion* gains more from the small-ensemble approach, I think, than its big sister, the *St Matthew*. Its emotional intimacy and urgency are better suited to the agility and immediacy a one-to-a-part performance brings, and the result can be a deeply compelling human drama. We have had several decent 'chamber' *St Johns* in recent years – including recordings from the Ricercar Consort (7/11), Cantus Cölln and Portland Baroque (both 3/12) – but this new one from John Butt and the Dunedin Consort really struck home for me by achieving its vital results without extravagant overstatement, overt 'holiness' or self-conscious marking-out of the work's architecture. Indeed, naturalness and emotional honesty are what emerge from this tight-knit

and perfectly paced ensemble *Passion*, in which Bach's complex succession of recitatives, arias, choruses and chorales has surely seldom sounded so convincingly of a piece.

This is not, by the way, a polite way of saying that the performance lacks expressive variety or that performing standards are modest. On the contrary, the increasingly impressive Nicholas Mulroy's alert, lightly coloured Evangelist strikes a balance in which declamation and lyricism are equally ardent and equally touching, while Matthew Brook is a supple and authoritative Christ. The use of harpsichord and organ together in the recitatives gives their joint story-telling a reassuringly grounded quality; there is nothing 'ethereal' in this *St John* and it is better for it. Both singers also perform with great effectiveness in the arias, where they are joined by Joanne Lunn (her 'Ich folge dir gleichfalls' is a joyous and sure-footed gem) and Clare Wilkinson, whose distinctive alto, straightforward in expression and tellingly connected to her speaking voice, lends fragility to 'Von den Stricken'. Her desolate, almost whispered 'Die Trauernacht' in 'Es ist vollbracht!' also stabs to the heart.

When these four sing together in the choruses, to be joined by four more 'ripieno'

singers, their sound is pressing and urgent but never hectoring, so that whether representing a crowd baying for blood or a group of chastened or horror-struck sinners, they come across as a gathering of real people rather than a disembodied chorus. The fact that you can sometimes recognise a soloist's voice within the mix only adds to this impression of reality. Chorales are shaped with care and expressive sensitivity, but also never overcooked. The Dunedin Consort's reliance on relatively young casts such as this has always brought their performances an uplifting freshness and immediacy in their recordings of *Messiah*, the B minor Mass and of course the *St Matthew Passion*, but in this harrowing piece it allows the sense of drama and personal identification to reach a higher level.

There is, however, another unique layer to this *St John*, for the piece is set in the context of the Good Friday Vespers liturgy of Bach's Leipzig. This is where John Butt's scholarly curiosity pays off, for he clearly sees the liturgical setting not as a dilution but an intensification of the work's message. In this presentation the *Passion* – the service, not the oratorio – starts with an Easter chorale, first in Bach's organ setting (played by Butt)



The Dunedin Consort in session at Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh



John Butt: scholarly curiosity adds a unique layer

and then sung by a congregation (actually the University of Glasgow Chapel Choir) alternating verses with a solo Mulroy. Then a short burst from a Buxtehude Praeludium leads straight to the opening chorus, nearly nine minutes after the disc has started. A similar sequence follows Part 1, and Part 2 is prefaced by another organ chorale. Immediately after the oratorio has ended (and let's not pretend that the usual ending, a simple chorale to follow the glowing choral farewell that is 'Ruht wohl', does not sometimes sit strangely) comes *Ecce quomodo moritur*, a gentle funeral motet by the Renaissance composer Jacobus Handl Gallus (sung rather well by the University Choir again under James Grossmith).

The reconstruction then ends with a few liturgical nuts and bolts and a final chorale for the congregation.

None of this extra material interrupts the Passion music itself – which, for the record, is a composite version representing what Bach's uncompleted 1739 revision might have been like – and it can be programmed out if desired. But while you may not always want to sit through nine verses of chorale before getting down to business (or indeed listen to the half-time sermon, taken from a 1720 collection by Erdmann Neumeister, which is downloadable from the Linn website!), the effect of the violin swirls, pounding lower strings and intertwining oboe suspensions of that great opening chorus interrupting Buxtehude's somewhat Gothic organ prelude certainly deserves more than one hearing. Butt makes a nice point in his booklet-note about how Bach's Passion performances would have brought together in one project local singers of all abilities, from the soloists to the 'motet choir' to members of the congregation; and if his aim here has been to position this in the listener's imagination and suggest the element of inclusive community that any Passion performance ought to have, well, it works for me. **G**

Listening points

Your guide to the disc's memorable moments

Disc 1, tracks 3-4: **Buxtehude** **Praeludium; 'Herr,** **unser Herrscher'**

An organ prelude by Buxtehude is cut off in mid-flow and we are plunged theatrically into Bach's weighty opening number, delivered with controlled urgency and compelling clarity.

Disc 1, track 16: 'Ich **folge dir gleichfalls'**

The work's most carefree moment surely never sounded more radiantly fresh and untroubled than in this delightful performance by Joanne Lunn.

Disc 1, tracks 21-22: **'Er leugnete aber** **und sprach';** **'Ach, mein Sinn!'**

The recounting of the moment of Peter's denial

and the jagged, guilt-racked aria that follows show the interpretative and moving lyrical intelligence of Nicholas Mulroy as the Evangelist.

Disc 2, track 26: **'Es ist vollbracht!'**

No matriarchal contralto or pristine countertenor here; instead the complex of emotions occasioned by Christ's death and all it signifies gains depth from the vocal honesty of Clare Wilkinson.

Disc 2, tracks 42-43: **Organ chorale;** **'Nun danket alle Gott'**

The end of any service, or performance, is a moment of tensional release from internal reflection and concentration back into the outside world: you can feel that right here.



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Orchestral



David Threasher on a 'petite' recording of Haydn's 'day trilogy':

'From sunrise to storm, the players are minutely responsive to the drama in these symphonic vignettes' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**



David Gutman on Prokofiev concertos from Steinbacher:

'Many passages are "roughed-up" at the expense of absolute beauty of tone; others might strike you as stolid' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 51**

JS Bach

'Harpichord Concertos, Vol 1'

Concertos^a - BWV1052; BWV1053; BWV1056.

Concerto in the Italian Style, BWV971

^aHelsinki Baroque Orchestra / Aapo Häkkinen *hpd*

Aeolus Ⓢ AE10057 (65' • DDD/DSD)



Finnish harpsichordist plays concertos on a Hass copy

Is the 16-foot harpsichord register making a comeback? Andreas Staier has been making much use of this Landowska-esque device recently – for instance in his *Goldberg Variations* (Harmonia Mundi, 6/10) – and here now is Aapo Häkkinen having fun with it in this first volume of Bach harpsichord concertos. For him it's part of a carefully conceived ensemble that also includes a continuo organ and a violone playing mostly at 8-foot pitch, and though you could be forgiven for hardly noticing the organ, so tidily and discreetly is it deployed, the two together add gruff body to the sound without obscuring textural detail. That is quite something in itself, but it also gives that 16-foot sound more space to cut loose, as it does to carefree effect in the running basses of the E major and G minor finales or in the pounding chords and contrary-motion climax of the last solo in the D minor Concerto.

Yet Häkkinen does not wear it out, using it only to increase his dynamic and textural range, and there's a compelling stillness and minimalism in the solo episode starting at 2'28" in the D minor's first movement, while elsewhere neat fingerwork is illuminated by the delicate voicing of his instrument, a Hass copy which once belonged to Igor Kipnis no less (though not the one on which he recorded these concertos with Marriner in the late 1960s). Perhaps, indeed, a desire to prevent the rush of sound from taking over can go too far, resulting in some over-clipped articulation and cautious tempi (in first movements mainly), and a deleterious effect on forward momentum. But when they do get going, these performances are enjoyable, even thrilling. And there appear to be no inhibitions in the rip-roaring *Italian Concerto* that rounds off the disc, in which the harpsichord, transported now to a church acoustic, achieves almost organ-like fullness. Wow! **Lindsay Kemp**

Barber • Corigliano • Dvořák

Barber Essay No 1 Corigliano One Sweet Morning

Dvořák Symphony No 7, Op 70

Stephanie Blythe *mez*

New York Philharmonic / Alan Gilbert

New York Philharmonic Ⓢ NYP20120101 (75' • DDD)

Recorded live at Avery Fisher Hall, New York,

October 4, 2011



Three works from New York including 9/11 premiere

John Corigliano's imposing song-cycle *One Sweet Morning* was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic to commemorate the 10th anniversary of September 11. Writing it must have proved a challenging and in some respects unenviable task, given the need to balance the inevitable emotional imperative with a sense of distance necessary if durable art is going to be the outcome, which I think, in this case, it is. Corigliano confirmed his constructive approach in an interview, saying that after the horrific events themselves, 'we have a chance to look back at 9/11 and then look back further, to see how it fits into the drama of all the world's wars, all the world's battles, all the world's horrible mistreatments of people'. The trans-national texts used are by Czesław Miłosz, Homer, Li Po and EY Harburg, and the orchestral style ranges from sublime simplicity to the harrowing sounds of battle (in the Patroclus excerpt from Homer's *Iliad*) where post-Bergian resonances underline vivid parallels (and I mean this in the best sense) between Corigliano and the finest American film composers, for example Leonard Rosenman. Mezzo Stephanie Blythe's performance of the premiere is strong and sonorous, while Alan Gilbert conducts a compelling account of Corigliano's multifaceted score.

I was equally impressed by his persuasive way with Barber's essentially lyrical First Essay (Barber being an obvious influence on Corigliano), the opening bars offering proof that Gilbert has honed his orchestra back into something of its old, inimitable self (meaning the Philharmonic of Mitropoulos and Walter) – big-boned and fleshy with plenty of scope for expressive solos. Dvořák's Seventh Symphony has drama to spare, its stormy language like a 19th-century footnote to Corigliano's impassioned tribute, the performance

sincere, forthright and mostly very well played, if not quite up there with the best. All in all, this is an impressive document and I'll henceforth be on the lookout for other performances that bear Gilbert's name. **Rob Cowan**

Blumenfeld • Catoire

Blumenfeld Symphony, 'A la mémoire des chers

défunts', Op 39 Catoire Symphony, Op 7

Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Martin Yates

Dutton Epoch Ⓢ CDLX7298 (74' • DDD)



A pair of Romantic Russian rarities from Yates and RSNO

These two Russian symphonies come from a time when Tchaikovsky was still role model No 1, Myaskovsky had yet to appear and the young Rachmaninov and Scriabin were the new front-runners. Each work is open to charges of epigonism, yet each is a valuable document.

Blumenfeld was one of a long line of Russian symphonists known as both a pianist and a teacher. Information about his only symphony is scant, with even its date uncertain (there was a first performance in 1907). Malcolm MacDonald's booklet-note speculates that it may have been written in commemoration of casualties in the 1905 Revolution. Even without the subtitle to guide us, and even before the slow finale, the piece has a strongly elegiac tone. The finale itself is shorter and rather more perfunctory than that of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* but is surely modelled on it – Bruch's Violin Concerto is also referenced melodically. In truth, this movement is a bit of a let-down, after many stirring pages leading up to it. The rival Russian recording, still obtainable with a bit of shopping around, has a special sweep and aura but Martin Yates and the RSNO are more sure-footed technically and bring out almost as much Russian *nobilmente*.

Catoire's symphony is an even greater rarity. It was composed piecemeal over a number of years from around 1889 and may never have received a complete premiere in the composer's lifetime (here MacDonald's sources are queried by Anna Zassimova's recently published monograph on the composer). With all due respect to Catoire's often poetic chamber and piano music, symphonic composition was



The Helsinki Baroque Orchestra accompany Aapo Häkkinen on a harpsichord that once belonged to Igor Kipnis

clearly not his *métier*. The alternating metres of the *scherzo* are momentarily interesting but Russian reviewers who found the first movement bitty were not wrong, and some of the invention in the slow movement and finale feels laboured and sketchy. That's no reflection on the performance and recording; and no reason not to invest, if you are at all interested in Russian symphonism in the Silver Age.

David Fanning

Blumenfeld – selected comparison:

USSR SO, *Galochkin* (RUSS) RDCD11052

Chopin

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 11^a; No 2, Op 21^b

Shura Cherkassky *pf*^a **BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra** / **Christopher Adey**; ^b**BBC Symphony Orchestra** / **Richard Hickox**

ICA Classics © ICAC5085 (75' • DDD)

Recorded live at ^aStudio 1, Broadcasting House, Glasgow, December 3, 1981; ^bRoyal Albert Hall, London, August 30, 1983



Cherkassky's BBC concertos from Glasgow and London

Maddening or enchanting – Cherkassky could veer from one to the other. Taking a mischievous delight in a freedom that never made one performance like another, he drove conductors to distraction, reversing decisions taken during lengthy rehearsals. And here, in

performances dating from 1981 and 1983, when Cherkassky was in his seventies, there is a characteristic if extreme example of failure and success. In Chopin's E minor Concerto the idiosyncrasy is at its least engaging, oddly strenuous and disjointed though with brief flashes of magic in the central 'Romanze'.

Mercifully, the Second Concerto presents a different story and comes like a breath of fresh air after so much stifling and distracting oddity. There is a far greater sense of impetus and propulsion, a true sense of a virtuoso aplomb and that youthful ardour that took Chopin's early audiences by the ears. Again, all who delight in Cherkassky's sudden vehemence and equally suddenly withdrawals, his piquancies and underlinings, will not be disappointed. This is vintage Cherkassky; playing to charm the birds out of the trees. Richard Hickox manages to keep everything on the move and, unlike Christopher Adey, caught Cherkassky on one of his less erratic, most life-affirming days. An odd mix, then, but more than worth it for the Second Concerto. **Bryce Morrison**

Copland • Kats-Chernin • Mozart

Copland Clarinet Concerto **Kats-Chernin**

Ornamental Air^a **Mozart Clarinet Concerto, K622^a**

Swedish Chamber Orchestra /

Michael Collins *cl*^a *basset cl*

Chandos © CHANI0756 (66' • DDD)



Collins in Sweden for clarinet concertos from three centuries

Of many famous soloists associated with the Mozart concerto I remember particularly the account of Gervase de Peyer, who played for Beecham with a memorably rich timbre, and Pat Ryan of the Hallé, whose tone was thinner and who also often played music written for the A clarinet on his B flat instrument, not wanting the bother of making the change but transposing the music note by note. The present memorable Mozart performance by Michael Collins uses the basset clarinet, which has extra notes at the bottom of its register, making the solo part much more effective, besides adding tonal richness throughout.

Elena Kats-Chernin (born in Taskent) wrote her *Ornamental Air* after emigrating to Australia. Its model was Mozart's concerto but its solo writing also takes advantage of the wider range of the basset clarinet, besides using Baroque lyricism and influences from jazz, rock and folk music. The strongly rhythmic first movement, often scattily unpredictable, initially uses a 5/4 tempo, then a cadenza leads into a voluptuous bluesy melody, derived at a distance from Liszt's Third *Liebestraum*. The finale then returns to the *scherzando* style, now in syncopated 4/4 time, before another cadenza brings a final outburst of virtuosity.

Throughout, Michael Collins is in his element, relishing every twist and turn of the music's consistently imaginative invention.

Copland's two-movement Concerto for clarinet, string orchestra and piano, written for Benny Goodman, divides into a dozen subsections but opens and ends radiantly, although before the close its jazz inflections dominate. The central cadenza acts as a linking device and the second movement is structured in free-rondo form. A second cadenza ends the piece jazzily and produces a fine *glissando*. Again Michael Collins is just as at home here as he is in the Mozart and Kats-Chernin, directing the Swedish Chamber Orchestra with idiomatic panache. **Ivan March**

Elgar · Smetana

Elgar Cello Concerto, Op 85^a

Smetana Má vlast - Vyšehrad; Vltava; Šárka

^a**Zuill Bailey** *vc* **Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra / Krzysztof Urbanski**

Telarc © TEL34030-02 (64' • DDD)

Recorded live at Hilbert Circle Theater, Indianapolis, March 30 & 31, 2012



Bailey and Urbanski live in Indianapolis

Zuill Bailey is a class act, as anyone who has investigated his recordings of the Korngold and Dvořák cello concertos (ASV, now Regis, 11/03^R; Telarc, 5/12) will already have discovered, and his alliance with Krzysztof Urbanski and the Indianapolis SO in the Elgar has much to commend it. This is a real, breathing performance excitingly caught on the wing and entirely devoid of flashy thrills and spills – I warm to its keen sincerity, unvarnished honesty and total lack of mannerism. Bailey, too, is such an articulate, selfless and communicative musician that no one could fail to derive pleasure from the finished article. If I'm being honest, there isn't quite the same sense of infectious teamwork, tumbling fantasy or canny instinct that marks out the recent Paul Watkins account (Chandos, 7/12); nor is the rather cramped recorded sound to my liking. Still, Bailey's heartfelt interpretation surely merits the enthusiastic reception it gets from the auditorium and undoubtedly represents another notable addition to the concerto's dauntingly crowded discography.

Turning to the somewhat odd coupling, Urbanski gives us the first three tone-poems from Smetana's *Má vlast* as a concert sequence (or at least the applause which greets 'Šárka' would seem to suggest as much). There's no shortage of intelligent observation, expressive fibre or red-blooded drama (indeed, the impulsive *attacca* plunge into 'Šárka' is highly effective, as is its savage denouement), and I do appreciate the songful ardour the young Polish conductor draws from his Indianapolis strings

throughout, but the later stages of 'Vltava' never quite come to the boil and the comparatively airless acoustic is unappealing too – no match, certainly, for Kubelík's thrillingly perceptive and tangily characterful live renderings from May 1984 with the Bavarian RSO on Orfeo (5/85), still my own 'go to' *Má vlast*. **Andrew Achenbach**

Goehr

When Adam Fell, Op 89^a. Pastorals, Op 18^b.

Marching to Carcassonne, Op 75^c

^c**Peter Serkin** *pf*^{ab} **BBC Symphony Orchestra;**

^c**London Sinfonietta / Oliver Knussen**

Naxos © 8 573052 (63' • DDD)

Recorded live at the ^cQueen Elizabeth Hall, London, May 22, 2003; ^bBBC Maida Vale Studio 1, July 5, 2011;

^aBarbican Hall, January 13, 2012



Three works by 'Manchester School' exemplar Goehr

Alexander Goehr turned 80 last August and this programme, spanning nearly 50 years of his creative life, is as welcome a birthday tribute as one could wish for. The earliest piece is the somewhat ironically named *Pastorals*, composed in 1965; ironic (for all the composer's explanation) because of the piece's invigorating Varèsian toughness. Though composed for an orchestra with a reduced complement of winds and no violas, its textures are mostly suggestive of chamber music, with the string ensemble and the two winds interjecting themselves only at intervals. *When Adam Fell*, completed in 2011, is more lyrical in its frame of reference (with just a suggestion of a Ländler at the start), though scarcely less tightly constructed, its material derived from the bass-line of Bach's chorale setting of that name.

The most extended piece here is a suite, *Marching to Carcassonne*, a set of character pieces (March, Invention, Chaconne, Burlesque and the like) unfolding as a series of episodes in which solo piano and chamber ensemble alternate. Over the course of the work, a more fluid dialogue is established between the two. This is perhaps the most accessible work here, though the opening march introduces a neo-classical element that is somewhat puzzling in the context of the rest of the programme. The live performances, two of which were recorded recently (that of *Marching to Carcassonne* dating back to 2003), are admirably committed and detailed, and very well captured. **Fabrice Fitch**

Gunning

Guitar Concerto, 'Requeros do Mallorca'^a.

Concerto for Clarinet and String Orchestra^b.

Concertino for Flute and Small Orchestra^c

^c**Catherine Handley** *fl*^b **Michael Whight** *cl*

^a**Craig Ogden** *gtr* **Royal Philharmonic Orchestra /**

Christopher Gunning

Discovery Music & Vision © DMV104 (67' • DDD)



Concertante works by screen composer Gunning

Anyone who has watched Agatha Christie's *Poirot* on television will have heard the striking opening sequence, the work of Christopher Gunning, who for half a century has followed a career involving such essential if modest music-making. This fine disc brings another side of Gunning's oeuvre in three highly attractive *concertante* works.

The Guitar Concerto (2010) was written for Craig Ogden and predictably brings echoes of Spanish music, indicated in the subtitle, *Requeros do Mallorca*. In creating an evocative atmosphere, Gunning uses the orchestra with the lightest of touches so that the guitar is never obscured. The first movement brings a sequence of attractive ideas, leading into a melancholy slow movement in the form of an aria, with the Spanish flavour nicely touched in. The lively finale is the most Spanish-sounding of all with its dancing syncopations and rapid repeated notes for the soloist.

The Clarinet Concerto is on just as impressive a scale and is brilliantly played here by RPO principal Michael Whight. The tone is rather more serious in the warm lyricism of the first movement, which culminates in an accompanied cadenza, bringing out the instrument's special qualities. The elegiac slow movement brings a haunting melody over pivoting chords, leading up to a vigorous middle section involving arpeggio figures. The finale is jaunty and jazzy in a neo-classical manner that rather recalls the comparable concertos of Malcolm Arnold.

The last of the three works on the disc is lighter in manner, a Concertino for flute and small orchestra in three brief but striking movements, here played brilliantly by Catherine Handley. After a brightly neo-classical first movement, the central movement is slow and thoughtful with the flute entering after a substantial introduction, attractively interweaving with the other solo instruments. The finale opens with a characteristically jaunty theme which leads on to a more lyrical central section. With the composer an ardent conductor inspiring compelling performances of all three works, it is an admirable disc to show off Christopher Gunning's still under-appreciated gifts. **Edward Greenfield**

Haydn

Symphonies - No 6, 'Le matin';

No 7, 'Le midi'; No 8, 'Le soir'

La Petite Bande / Sigiswald Kuijken

Accent © ACC24272 (72' • DDD)



Kuijken's small forces for Haydn's 'day trilogy'

Haydn's first symphonies for his new employer, Prince Paul Anton Esterházy, form a group of three for which the Germans have a characteristically mellifluous title, 'Die Tageszeiten' (the English is just as unwieldy: the 'Times of Day' Symphonies). When I surveyed the available recordings for a *Gramophone* Collection (6/09), it occurred to me that these early works don't quite stand up to such repeated listening; conversely, it became clear that many performances manage little more than to go through the motions, offering little of the playfulness of these *galant* confections.

Not so Sigiswald Kuijken and La Petite Bande in these lovingly presented performances. From sunrise to storm, these players (seven strings, seven wind – *petite* indeed) are minutely responsive to the drama in these symphonic vignettes: the singing lesson in *Le matin*'s slow movement; the lunchtime procession and domestic bustle that open *Le midi*; the quasi-operatic scena of the same work's *Adagio*. And not only do these mini-dramas reflect back to them the Esterházy family's daily life (a result of Paul Anton's suggestion that Haydn write something along the lines of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*), but the three symphonies exploit the solo skills of each of the orchestra's principals, from flute to double bass – not to mention heroic horns – each vividly characterised. Haydnistas will need to know that these performances are not harpsichord-accompanied. Tempi are moderate, which is not only a boon in the minuets but enables the solo instruments to speak with full tone in the finales, which are taken less briskly than, for example, Martin Haselböck's top-rated version. If you don't have that (or the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra's equally fine recording *with* harpsichord), you'll be hard-pressed to find a finer period-instrument performance than this.

David Thresher

Selected comparisons:

Freiburg Baroque Orch (6/02) (HARM) HMC90 1767

Vienna Academy, Haselböck (ARTS) 47701-2

Holst

The Planets, Op 32

Philharmonia Orchestra / Esa-Pekka Salonen

Video directors Nick Hillel, Guy Wigmore

Signum © DVD SIGDVD009; © SIGBRD001

(55' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 &

PCM stereo • 0 • s)



Philharmonia's landmark Planets project on screen

Conceived in conjunction with a summer 2012 installation at London's Science Museum, the Philharmonia's 'Universe of Sound Holst The Planets' is now available as a Blu-ray Disc of information and commentary surrounding a studio performance of the work filmed at

Watford's Colosseum. Overlaying the performance can be commentaries by Esa-Pekka Salonen and Richard Slaney or by principal members of the orchestra. Appendices include analysis of each movement, with music score examples, by the Philharmonia's Paul Richmond; an interview with composer Joby Talbot, who wrote a companion sequel to *The Planets* called *Worlds, Stars, Systems, Infinity*; and some items about the London exhibition.

The centrepiece of all this is a tautly rehearsed, unromantic, 'straight' performance of the piece under Salonen which will appeal to those who like Holst's own 'original' recordings – especially the sparky acoustic one – more than less 'modern' readings under Boult, Sargent and A and C Davis. Salonen manages to locate the work comfortably next to its European contemporaries (his voiceovers draw parallels with Sibelius's *Kullervo* and *Finlandia*) without the interventionist stylistic colouring of the Karajan extravaganzas or the Hollywood driving of some of the American readings. Do choose the option during 'Mars' of keeping Salonen's photo up in the left hand corner together with his commentary on how to beat what he thinks may be the longest symphonic movement in 5/4.

A deal of information is contained here and the release would be invaluable to younger students of the score or those planning to conduct it for the first time. The commentary from the orchestra members could have been more tightly sifted. Real gems of information about the piece and playing it as an ensemble fly by quickly and get lost in a sea of essentially once-only anecdote. Filming and recording of the performance are both state-of-the-art.

Mike Ashman

Khachaturian • Lyapunov

Khachaturian Concerto-Rhapsody[®]. Sonata-Monologue Lyapunov Violin Concerto, Op 61[®]

Hideko Udagawa *violin*

[®]Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Alan Buribayev

Signum © SIGCD312 (58' • DDD)



Udagawa plays concertos from two Russian traditions

Most of the one-movement concerto-rhapsodies Aram Khachaturian manufactured in the 1960s are less familiar than the concertos he composed for the same instruments earlier in his career, although none is without merit. Malcolm MacDonald, in his booklet-note for the present issue, goes so far as to suggest that the Concerto-Rhapsody in B flat minor, written to showcase the talents of the great Leonid Kogan, is 'probably a finer work than the better-known 1940 Violin Concerto'. I'm not sure I can agree. While Khachaturian's self-consciously Armenian harmonic language has developed, his structural thinking remains

IN THE STUDIO

An inside view of who's before the mics and what they're recording

• Britten in Wrocław

Britten's *War Requiem* will be recorded in the Polish town of Wrocław this year by a group of soloists and the combined forces of the Gabrieli Consort and Players, the Wrocław Philharmonic Choir and the Choir of New College, Oxford, all conducted by Paul McCreesh. The live recording will be issued on the Gabrieli's own label, Winged Lion, in September.

• Berlioz in Stockholm

Robin Ticciati will continue his association with Linn Records later this year, conducting not the Scottish Chamber Orchestra but the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Swedish Radio Choir in *L'enfance du Christ* by Hector Berlioz. The recording, from the Berwald Hall in Stockholm, will be released on Linn in September.



• Winterreise at the Wigmore

Alice Coote's performance of Schubert's *Winterreise* with pianist Julius Drake at Wigmore Hall in January will be issued on the hall's own label shortly. Reviews following the concert cited the mezzo's varied vocal palette and her natural authority with the cycle.

• Tchaikovsky in Birmingham

Producer Phil Rowlands communicated his delight via Twitter at being back in Birmingham in late-January to record Tchaikovsky's Third Symphony, the *Polish*, with the CBSO and Andris Nelsons. The recording will be released on the Orfeo label as part of the orchestra's Tchaikovsky symphony cycle under Nelsons.

• Bach on a mandolin

Nonesuch artist and mandolin player Chris Thile, who received a MacArthur Fellowship (known as a 'genius grant') in 2012, went into the studio in January to record an album of solo works by Johann Sebastian Bach. The disc, his first 'core' classical venture for Nonesuch, is released later this year.



Stravinsky

Octet, L'Histoire du Soldat

Eastman Wind Ensemble
Eastman Virtuosi
Mark Scatterday, conductor
Jan Opalach, narrator

The **Eastman Wind Ensemble** celebrates its 60th anniversary with its first recording for AVIE, a superb reading of Stravinsky's Octet, while the **Eastman Virtuosi** deliver a devilish rendition of L'Histoire du Soldat.



AV 2277

Dvořák

The Cypresses, String Quartet Op. 106

Cypress String Quartet

San Francisco-based **Cypress String Quartet** debuts on AVIE with its namesake work, coupled with the composer's expansive G major Quartet, No. 13.



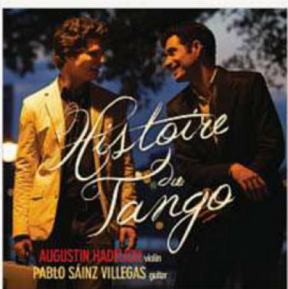
AV 2275

COMING SOON

Histoire du Tango

De Falla • Paganini • Piazzolla • Sarasate

Augustin Hadelich, partnered by guitarist **Pablo Sáinz Villegas**, conjures up a sultry night of fiery dancing on Histoire du Tango, with music inspired by Argentina's national dance, as well as folk, gypsy and flamenco influences.



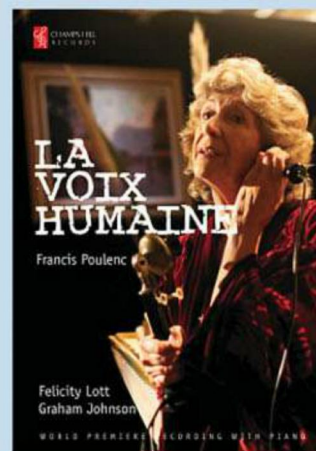
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NEW RELEASES



CHRC037

LA VOIX HUMAINE

Poulenc's one-woman tour de force to a Cocteau text

Felicity Lott with Graham Johnson in the world premiere recording of *La Voix Humaine* with piano accompaniment. The Poulenc Estate has granted special permission for this newly filmed performance for the first time since the composer's own performances accompanying Denise Duval, over 50 years ago. It is testament to Felicity's affinity with Poulenc's music and is a landmark for both the piece and the performers.

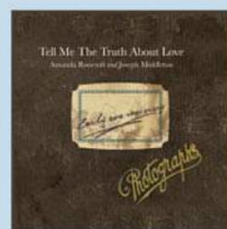
"Having made the role very much her own in recent years, Felicity Lott duly encompassed its range of emotional minutiae with an impressive command ... and impeccable French." *classical source.com*



CHRC028

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CHRC040

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Mastery: John Storgårds and his Helsinki Philharmonic players excel in the detail of Korngold's *Much Ado About Nothing*

loose. According to the composer himself, 'A concerto is music with chandeliers burning bright; a rhapsody is music with chandeliers dimmed, and the concerto-rhapsodies are both'. More practically, MacDonald suggests a family resemblance to the rhapsodies of Liszt, Bartók and Enescu. You can look forwards to some intriguingly dark, cinematic sonorities and plentiful opportunities for soloistic display – you might also notice a dearth of truly memorable melody!

On CD the Concerto-Rhapsody is usually attached to the Violin Concerto. Hideko Udagawa, who some years ago recorded other Khachaturian alongside Boris Berezovsky for the Koch label, prefers to explore relatively uncharted waters. In the event, the Sonata-Monologue proves disappointingly cautious in idiom. And the exceedingly well-wrought, 'academic' Lyapunov Concerto, placed between, risks coming across as a non sequitur. Written to the Glazunov formula in 1915 and revised in 1921, it is markedly less individual than, say, the epic Second Symphony championed, long after Lyapunov's death, by Evgeni Svetlanov (Naïve, 10/04). It might yet catch on in today's backwards-looking musical climate but needs a Shaham or a Vengerov.

In the 25 years since she first appeared on disc Hideko Udagawa has lost none of her old-school commitment and fire. Sadly her intonation, never a strong point, here sounds

distinctly fallible, so unless you warm to the idiosyncratic programme I'm afraid I must refer you to existing alternatives. Her collaborators sound merely dutiful. **David Gutman**

Khachaturian Conc-Rhapsody – selected comparison:

Koeckert, RPO, Serebrier (NAXO) 8 570988

Lyapunov: Vn Conc – selected comparison:

Fedotov, Russian PO, Yablonsky (NAXO) 8 570462

Korngold

Much Ado About Nothing, Op 11. Sinfonietta, Op 5
Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra / John Storgårds
 Ondine (M) 2 ODE1191-2D (87' • DDD)



First recording of Korngold's 1920 *Much Ado* score

Over the years there have been a number of recordings in various guises from Korngold's incidental music to *Much Ado About Nothing* but this is the first complete recording of all 14 movements Korngold composed for a production at Schönbrunn Castle in Vienna in 1920. They make a most attractive sequence, opening with an Overture in which Korngold adds his own inimitable touch by scoring piano and harmonium in the orchestration. Several titles are named after Shakespearean characters: Dogberry and Verges in a sinister 'March of the Watch', Balthazar's ditty 'Sigh no more ladies', sung in German, with the tenor soloist Mati Turi taking a rather grand view of it, and

music for the mock funeral of Hero, suitably anguished in tone. The movements progress seamlessly from one to another with an 'olde England' 'Masquerade', a tuning of fiddles in 'Festive Music' and a charming 'Garden Scene' with a lacing of chinoiserie in the orchestration. The Intermezzo introduces a lovely melody sung by the cello, 'The Maiden in the Bridal Chamber' presents a portrait of Hero as an anxious bride, followed by the 'Church Scene', with celebratory bells. An exuberant 'Final Dance', swinging to waltz time, brings the curtain down on this infectious concoction.

Korngold's Sinfonietta, a symphony in all but name, is an astonishing piece for a 14-year-old, assured in structure as it is in its fecundity of tunes and glittering orchestration. The complex scoring and mood-swings hold no qualms for the Helsinki Philharmonic who, under their conductor John Storgårds, offer a supremely confident performance that exudes all the charm, warmth and vitality with which this work abounds. Storgårds's mastery tells in small details such as the observation of the pause before the dramatic reprise of the *scherzo* or the luminous flickering landscape set before us in the *Andante*. His recording now supersedes the Bamert/BBC Philharmonic/ Chandos account, which has done us proud for nearly 20 years. **Adrian Edwards**

Sinfonietta – selected comparison:

BBC PO, Bamert (5/95) (CHAN) CHAN9317



Power, polish and finesse: Fabien Gabel conducts the Quebec Symphony Orchestra

Mendelssohn

Violin Concertos^a – in D minor, Op 64.

Violin Sonata, Op 4^b

Tianwa Yang *vn* ^bRomain Descharmes *pf*

^aSinfonia Finlandia Jyväskylä / Patrick Gallois

Naxos © 8 572662 (67' • DDD)



Two concertos and a sonata from Chinese violinist Yang

Despite the best efforts of Yehudi Menuhin in championing Mendelssohn's Concerto in D minor, the youthful work has never caught on as a repertory staple. On the concert stage, Menuhin's most successful legacy was in getting the composer's Op 64 – generally known as *the* Mendelssohn Violin Concerto – listed as Violin Concerto No 2.

Violinist Tianwa Yang's performance of Concerto No 1 in no way threatens Menuhin's primacy with the work – to say nothing of his three recordings – though she does maintain his standards of advocacy. Pairing the D minor Concerto with the composer's later Concerto in E minor, Yang manages to reveal the early work neither as merely a disposable confection by a precocious child nor as a masterpiece in its own right.

Under her bow, the two pieces become bookends of the same sensibility, a similar approach to both content and structure differing mainly in the maturity of the

composer's craft. Fitting somewhere outside this axis is the Violin Sonata in F minor, Op 4, which, although it was written a year later than Mendelssohn's earlier concerto, puts less of the composer's brilliance on display. Where the concertos showcase Yang's presence of sound and lyrical grace on a grand scale, the sonata offers her fluid phrasing a more intimate though less interesting canvas. If her partnership with pianist Romain Descharmes is less successful than with Patrick Gallois and the Sinfonia Finlandia Jyväskylä, it's mostly because the music gives the piano so little to do.

Ken Smith

Paganini

Moto perpetuo, Op 11. Violin Concerto No 5

(orch Mompellio). I palpiti, Op 13

Ivan Pochekin *vn*

Russian Philharmonic Orchestra / Dmitry Yablonsky

Naxos © 8 590487 (56' • DDD)



Paganini Competition winner plays the Fifth Concerto

Paganini's Fifth Concerto, the last he composed, is preserved only in the form of a solo part, which, however, contains copious indications concerning the orchestration. This recording uses Federico Mompellio's completion. I find more convincing the lighter, simpler version by Francesco Fiore, heard on

Massimo Quarta's recording; but perhaps in a work focused primarily on the solo part the differences aren't of major significance.

The disc stands out for its crisply defined recording and for the exceptional playing of Ivan Pochekin, whose pure tone, wide expressive range and precise articulation and tuning bring Paganini's ideas vividly to life. The concerto's *Andante* is especially eloquent in Pochekin's hands and the high passagework in the outer movements has authentic force and brilliance. There are some drawbacks: the orchestral playing is sometimes lacking in verve, particularly in the *tutti*s after the first movement's first solo, and before the return of the finale's rondo theme. And the finale's curious second episode, with its amiable woodwind melody accompanied by springing violin arpeggios, is far more successful in Accardo's gentler, more laid-back account than in Pochekin's up-front version.

The other two items are both excellent: *I palpiti*'s variation in double-stopped harmonics, taken quite slowly, sounds truly beautiful. And the *Moto perpetuo* is just as spectacular – wonderful bow control and a lively sense of rhythm. I'm sure even Paganini himself would be impressed. **Duncan Druce**

Vn Conc No 5 – selected comparisons:

Quarta, *Orch of Teatro Carlo Felice, Genoa*

(9/09) (DYNA) CDS622

Accardo, *LPO, Dutoit (DG) 463 754-2GB6*

Prokofiev

Violin Concertos³ – No 1, Op 19; No 2, Op 63.

Solo Violin Sonata, Op 115

Arabella Steinbacher *vn*

³Russian National Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko

Pentatone  PTC5186 395 (64' • DDD/DSD)



Petrenko and Steinbacher with both Prokofiev concertos

Prokofiev's violin concertos have been strongly represented on disc since the mid-1930s when Joseph Szigeti and Jascha Heifetz took up the First and Second respectively. Subsequently the works made a logical and satisfying pairing on vinyl LP. We expect something extra today; hence Arabella Steinbacher follows Gil Shaham in accommodating the 1947 Violin Sonata Prokofiev intended to be played by students en masse. It can seem rather underwhelming as a solo offering, especially if you know Bartók's near-contemporaneous masterpiece, but Steinbacher does her best to disguise the prevailing blandness. Her general approach could be caricatured as heavy-handed, unfairly I think, even if her account of the First Violin Concerto is quite unlike Shaham's, let alone that of Julia Fischer in her debut recording on the Pentatone label.

Renditions of this score still tend to be predominantly lyrical in feeling, Leila Josefowicz being one of the few to unearth a more belligerent subtext. Steinbacher also ditches some of the fairy-tale magic, making the piece seem 'bigger' through generally slower tempi and a wider range of expressive effects. The opening theme is not so much virginally pure as knowingly romanticised and there is a fair amount of unorthodox point-scoring later on. Many passages are played relatively straight but articulated with exceptional bravado, 'roughed up' at the expense of absolute beauty of tone; others might strike you as merely stolid.

If Steinbacher can be more ponderous than her rivals, she is also more original and it helps that she is so well served by both her accompanists and her sound team. While it is true that neither concerto was written to Soviet order, it is surprising how few authentically Russian orchestras, as opposed to soloists, feature on the *Gramophone* database. On this occasion Vasily Petrenko directs the Russian National Orchestra with his customary precision, launching the earlier concerto to rapt effect and providing a jewel-like instrumental backcloth underpinned by high-definition bass-lines. Even if Steinbacher's Strad is brought rather close (she plays the 'Booth' instrument of 1716 previously on loan to Fischer), the sonic effect is spellbinding.

Prokofiev begins the Second Concerto with the soloist unaccompanied, the idea unspooling here more subjectively than some will like. Nor

does Steinbacher quite nail the ecstatic lyricism of the slow movement. You'll need to seek out Kyung-Wha Chung's analogue recording to hear just how touching this music can be.

As befits an admirer of Ivry Gitlis with a scholarship from the Anne-Sophie Mutter Foundation, Steinbacher sounds determined to rethink these repertoire staples. Eschewing the settled eloquence of a David Oistrakh, she varies her tonal projection to highlight Prokofiev's tendency to step on the throat of his own song. The verdict? Better try before you buy, although audiophiles and surround sound aficionados should not hesitate.

David Gutman

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Shaham, LSO, Previn (6/96) (DG) 447 758-2GH

Vn Concs Nos 1 & 2 – selected comparisons:

Chung, LSO, Previn (7/90) (DECC) 425 003-2DM

Josefowicz, Montreal SO, Dutoit

(12/01) (PHIL)  462 592-2PH

Oistrakh, LSO, von Mátai, Philb Orch, Galliera

(11/04) (EMI) 562888-2

Vn Conc No 1 – selected comparison:

Fischer, Russian Natl Orch, Kreizberg

(1/05) (PENT) PTC5186 059

Rachmaninov

The Isle of the Dead, Op 29. The Rock, Op 7.

Symphonic Dances, Op 45

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / Andrew Litton

BIS  BIS1751 (71' • DDD/DSD)



Rachmaninov tone-poems from Litton in Bergen

While it must be acknowledged that ominous, despondent images of mortality haunt *The Isle of the Dead*, this performance of it by Andrew Litton and the Bergen Philharmonic is curiously lifeless and earthbound. It has its moments, chiefly at climaxes, and elsewhere it inhabits appropriate realms of hush. But in establishing the mystery and apprehension that Rachmaninov drew from Arnold Böcklin's picture it is under-characterised. Even the pull of the oars at the start – one of Rachmaninov's most inspired ideas – is strangely mundane and lacking in rhythmic and expressive suppleness. Compared, say, with the potent atmosphere and power conjured up by front-runners such as Evgeni Svetlanov and the USSR Symphony Orchestra, Mariss Jansons and the St Petersburg Philharmonic or Vladimir Ashkenazy and the Concertgebouw, this one is only sporadically successful.

The Rock fares better: Litton has a good grasp of its romantic sweep and sustains its narrative and emotional thread. Like *The Isle of the Dead*, however, the *Symphonic Dances* are convincing only in parts. Individual episodes have a strong profile and refined shaping, coupled with the lucid orchestral texture that typified Rachmaninov's later music. But in mastering

the overall structure and dealing with those passages that link the main events, Litton is on less certain ground. The organic nature of the music is compromised, although Litton does find a propulsive thrust and incisiveness to underpin the finale's rhythmic syncopation and dynamism. **Geoffrey Norris**

Isle of the Dead – selected comparisons:

Concertgebouw Orch, Ashkenazy (4/84^R, 8/91) (DECC)

430 733-2DM, 455 798-2DC3 or (ELOQ) 470 675-2

St Petersburg PO, Jansons (EMI) 575510-2 or 500885-2

USSR SO, Svetlanov (REGI) RRC1247

Saint-Saëns-Tchaikovsky

Saint-Saëns Cello Concerto No 1, Op 33. Allegro


appassionato, Op 43. Carnival of the Animals – The

Swan Tchaikovsky Variations on a Rococo Theme,

Op 33. Pezzo capriccioso, Op 62

Stéphane Tétrault *vc*

Quebec Symphony Orchestra / Fabien Gabel

Analekta  AN2 9881 (53' • DDD)



Concertante cello works from 19-year-old Canadian Tétrault

From the very first bars of Saint-Saëns's First Cello Concerto you sense that this disc is going to be exhilarating and rewarding. The performers launch the concerto with terrific passion and positive intent, and thereafter call into play a discriminating, captivating spectrum of interpretative sensibility. The solo playing is astonishingly mature not merely in its technical attributes but also in its warmth, brilliance and subtlety of colour and inflection, so it comes as a shock to realise that Stéphane Tétrault is 19 years old. His is a name to watch.

Let's not forget the first-rate support from the Orchestre Symphonique de Québec under Fabien Gabel, who bring their own power, polished phrasing and finesse to the music, but it is difficult not to be attracted particularly by what the young Tétrault does here.

Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme* is played with uncommon poise, discreet and poignant lyrical allure as well as the lustre the piece needs. The lovely orchestral flutes in the third variation attest to the care with which Gabel approaches the score. They do the Fitzenhagen version, so the *Variations* ends with thrilling *joie de vivre*, but that does not overshadow the eloquence and insight with which Tétrault tackles the entire piece. With the three short fillers beautifully done, this is a disc to cherish. **Geoffrey Norris**

Schubert

Symphonies – No 5, D485; No 6, D589

Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra / David Zinman

RCA Red Seal  88725 46336-2 (60' • DDD)



Zinman's Zurich Schubert symphony cycle continues

He's cultivated and urbane. David Zinman coasts along feeling no undercurrents within No 5. For him, Schubert remains the teenager of smiling cherubic countenance. The booklet describes the opening movement as a 'graceful *Allegro*' and the first subject certainly begins that way. But the mood changes as terse, biting *sforzandos* drive the music towards the second subject, where the mood changes again. Zinman moderates the contrasts, and also blends the strings and wind in the slow movement. Michi Gaigg is meticulously attentive to their distinctive timbres within the balance, as she is to the unexpected presence of more *sforzandos*, particularly from horns that rough up this 'bewitchingly beautiful *Andante*'. Gaigg detects Schubert's emotional state; Zinman is unperturbed.

Ostensibly, though, he is more committed in the opening *Adagio* of No 6 but reverts to nonchalance in the following *Allegro*, the letter always observed but obligations to creative conducting set aside. Zinman lets the notes spin off the pages and the Zurich Tonhalle's immensely skilful spinning seems no more than an instinctive reaction to uninspired direction. Lines aren't clarified, layers aren't shaded for variety; and the finale acquires a mood of perpetual motion, too fast for *Allegro moderato* as well. Listen to Frans Brüggen to hear the difference between patter and drama, the text energised through expressive articulation that reveals the depth and inner vitality of the music. He accepts responsibility for a personal interpretation of Schubert and fine-tunes listeners' perceptions, perhaps even those of his musicians. Zinman does neither. **Nalen Anthoni**

Sym No 5 – selected comparison:

Gaigg (11/12) (DHM) 88697 91138-2

Sym No 6 – selected comparison:

Brüggen (PHIL) 475 7955PB4

Schumann



Complete Symphonies. Documentary: 'Schumann at Pier2' – a concert film by Christian Berger

Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen /
Paavo Järvi

C Major Entertainment (M) (3) DVD 711908;

712004 (146' + 98' + 27' • NTSC • 16:9 •

1080p • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s)

Bonus features: 'The Making of Schumann at Pier2';
'Bremen – A Chamber Philharmonic Portrait'



Järvi conducts Schumann's symphonies at a dockyard

This is the sort of set that makes me grateful that classical recordings are still being made. As a refresher course in Schumann symphonies, you won't find anything better: the overall transparency of each performance, the tautness, interpretative 'edge' (sometimes bordering on danger), warmth and determination to exploit to the full the many contrasts that keep each

score so endlessly stimulating, all these virtues and more serve to focus the music in a unique way. I should tell you that the performances of Symphonies Nos 1 and 3 are not the ones on CD (RCA) that I reviewed last March and that were awarded *Gramophone* Choice status. Those were recorded at the Funkhaus Berlin in December 2009 and April 2010, whereas these 2011 performances were filmed in the acoustically impressive Pier2, a former dockyard building turned music workshop and film set at the port of Bremen. Similar performances though, and sound for that matter, with maybe a hint more inner detail on the CD.

Regular readers will know that as a rule I'm not one for straight orchestral concert DVDs – I object to all the visual distractions – but these productions (directed by Christian Berger) are a cut above average. Aside from the performances themselves, which are subject to sensitive and unobtrusive camerawork, there are gentle masterclasses on each symphony where Järvi offers chapter and verse, not only on the music but on the circumstances of Schumann's life when the pieces were written. As part of the educating process, individual players are invited to perform key passages solo, often dovetailing with the orchestra to provide a proper context. Their comments are not infrequently as engaging as Järvi's own and you feel, after watching these absorbing mini-documentaries, that the orchestra's overriding interpretative principle is 'nothing without good reason'.

As to detail, I like the way secondary lines 'tell' without barging to the fore, and the clarity of the string lines – especially the violins where, in the finale of the Second Symphony, by being divided left and right of the rostrum they create a vivid antiphonal swirl. In the finale of the First Symphony, after the appearance of the perky *Kreisleriana* theme on the woodwinds, Järvi slightly broadens the tempo for the strings' gruff response. Ebb and flow is very much his thing; in the first movement of the Fourth, for example, where the second subject of the main *Allegro* broadens expressively, and again in the *Rhenish*, some minor shifts in tempo, nothing obtrusive, but always supportive of the principal arguments. Interesting, watching him cue the Fourth's 'Romanze' on the heels of its first movement. The initial impression is of a potential miscue – the music actually sounds as if it could accommodate another chord – but the now popular option of bringing in the movement *attacca* really does work in context. And how exhilarating to hear the finale of the Third carrying so little weight, a 'Life's Dance' after the humbling solemnity of the previous 'Cologne Cathedral' movement.

All repeats are played and although some may take issue with the occasional fast tempo

(ie the first Trio in the First Symphony's *Scherzo*), nothing sounds musically illogical. Watching the players is a joy, and for this old CD-only Luddite to make that claim is saying something. The fact is that the DKB play as one. In my review of the RCA CD I suggested that the orchestra is 'evidently manned by players who listen very closely to one another (these performances are rather like "chamber music writ large")', and watching them confirms that happy impression.

There will be times when contrasting CD options will queue for attention (Zacharias, Harmoncourt and Zinman among them) but I can't imagine any sensitive music lover failing to respond to this artistically exceptional, beautifully filmed and expertly engineered set. It certainly gave me a great deal of pleasure.

Rob Cowan

Szymanowski



Symphonies – No 2, Op 19; No 4, 'Symphonie concertante', Op 60^o. Concert Overture, Op 12

^aLouis Lortie pf

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Edward Gardner

Chandos (P) CHSA5115 (71' • DDD/DSD)



Gardner moves from Lutosławski to Szymanowski

The whole Szymanowski landscape is here, from the Strauss-infatuated *Concert Overture* to the folk-inflected Bartókian pianism of the exotic Fourth Symphony – and though a single sitting might prove indigestible and is probably not advised, the changing face and manner of this most fascinating and accomplished of composers is richly chronicled here in characteristically impressive Chandos sound.

Edward Gardner and the BBC Symphony Orchestra were both probably thinking back to the last time they encountered Strauss's *Don Juan* as they fire up his trusty steed to pastures new. *Ecstatico passionato* is the marking that leaves one in absolutely no doubt as to how this hefty *Concert Overture* should go and those overreaching horns are a constant reminder of the Straussian inheritance. The best pages of the piece are the Byronic wanderings – verdant and then some – and the virility of the rest throws them into high relief.

There is still an abundance of Strauss running through the opening movement of the Second Symphony, with uncannily scored chamber-textured pages redolent of *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* lifted to *Rosenkavalier* opulence. Gardner and the BBC SO convey its irresistible pull towards ever more effusive climaxes. A musical jacuzzi to be sure. I'm not sure what it says but I like the noise it makes. And it is followed by a hypnotically beautiful start to the second movement, where restraint and harmonic depth of utterance achieve something quite special. Variations don't often begin with



Getting to the heart of Szymanowski: Edward Gardner conducts the BBC Symphony Orchestra at Watford Colosseum

the theme so exquisitely adorned (Elgar's *Enigma* an exception) and the distance that Szymanowski puts between himself and the ensuing variations is also intriguing. As for the contrapuntal work-out of the finale, it points to where Schoenberg and Berg were to take the Straussian ethos.

Szymanowski's influences could hardly be more clearly defined than they are here but in the Fourth Symphony his obvious kinship with the rugged folk inflections of Bartók's piano concertos (and this symphony is one in all but name) is subsumed into a lushly impressionistic whole that is entirely Szymanowski's own. Louis Lortie is the 'wanderer' whose musings take us high into the Tatra Mountains. Solo flute and violin achieve a lofty tranquillity in the haunting slow movement and for me this (as opposed to where he is out-Straussing Strauss) is where Szymanowski's heart is.

Edward Seckerson

Tan Dun

Concerto for Orchestra. Orchestral Theatre.
Symphonic Poem on Three Notes
Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra / Tan Dun
Naxos © 8 570608 (65' • DDD)



Tan Dun from the Hong Kong Phil and its local record label

As the title implies, the *Symphonic Poem* is based on three notes. Not particularly interesting notes; just the first three of an ascending minor scale (inspired, it would seem, by the name of

Plácido Domingo, for whom it was written in 2012). They are not seriously expanded or transposed, and only towards the very end of this 12-minute work do they fleetingly toy with the major. But what makes this all so absorbing is the way in which Tan Dun uses a plethora of percussive and other effects – not the least of them being rhythmic vocalisations from the orchestra – to propel the piece forward. Clearly the members of the Hong Kong Philharmonic are having a ball and the effect is often thrilling.

Understandably from a composer who remains associated in the minds of most in the West with his score for the movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the *Symphonic Poem* is distinctly cinematographic, while the 18-minute *Orchestral Theatre* is driven largely by the theatricality of great percussive outbursts, calling to mind the cacophonous chaos of Chinese New Year celebrations. Again plenty of vocalisations from the orchestra (only the male members, it would seem) in a bid to, as Tan puts it in his booklet-notes, 'have outrageous music imageries meet my mystic philosophy and melt into the rice fields of my memory'. Hmmmm!

With the 35-minute *Concerto for Orchestra* we encounter Tan in true concert mode – although he still cannot resist rhythmic vocal (and physical) interjections from his orchestra; and, being inspired by the journeying of Marco Polo, it retains a distinctly programmatic flavour. More importantly, it gives us a chance to experience the splendid Hong Kong Philharmonic at its most assured. Among the

glories are the delicate trombones which set the whole work into motion and outstanding virtuoso exhibitions from oboe and clarinet in the atmospheric third movement ('The Raga of the Desert'). This is a vivid demonstration of true orchestral virtuosity, with Tan Dun's experimental effects superbly realised, and all captured in fulsome sound from what is, after all, the local record label.

Marc Rochester

Tchaikovsky

Symphony No 2, 'Little Russian', Op 17.
Variations on a Rocooc Theme, Op 33^a.
Andante cantabile, Op 11^a

^aLeonard Elschenbroich VC

Cologne Gürzenich Orchestra / Dmitri Kitaenko
Oehms Classics © OC669 (63' • DDD/DSD)



Fourth disc in Kitaenko's Cologne Tchaikovsky series

A decent account of Tchaikovsky's so-called *Little Russian* Symphony – though not so little in this expansive and beefy Cologne production. But Dmitri Kitaenko and the cultured Gürzenich Orchestra are nothing if not mindful of that delicate balance between the classical and emotive aspects of Tchaikovsky's nature and to that end the wistful horn-led folk theme of the first movement is set up in leisurely contrast to the driving *Allegro*. I've heard 'dirtier', more trenchant accounts of that; and the finale, too, is a little too grandly imperialistic, where the

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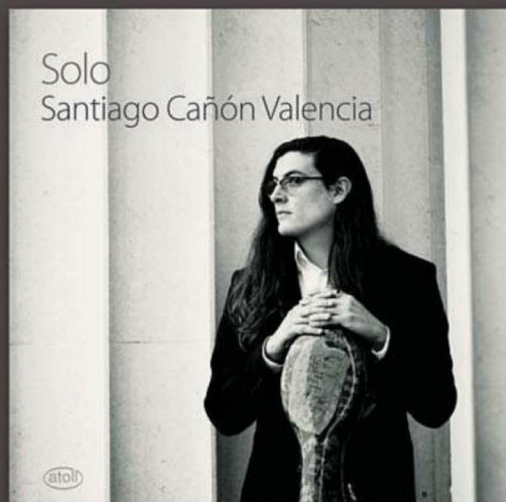
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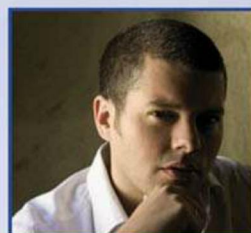


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recent Pletnev recording with the splendid Russian National Orchestra found ways of maintaining its formality while making it racier and splashier. Those of us brought up on the likes of Svetlanov and Markevitch will know that that innate Russianism – as in rangier and brassier – is pretty much a thing of the past. Kitaenko's middle movements are in the best taste, with the second movement's jaunty 'patrol' nicely bled into the contrasting Trio.

With this kind of reading of the symphony, Tchaikovsky's *Rococo* Variations makes an especially elegant coupling, the Gürzenich Orchestra's classical heritage feeding into the Russian master's wonderfully intuitive way with variation form. The soloist, Leonard Elschenbroich, seems to 'belong' among their number, offering the kind of honest, generous and yet self-effacing playing that seems to emanate from the first desk of the cellos. It's a rich and mellifluous sound but one that can be scaled back to the finest nuancing. The *Andante sostenuto* variation, one of those great examples of Tchaikovsky elevating the commonplace to the sublime, is the more beautiful in his hands for being modest and unaffected. The *Andante cantabile* filler (from the First String Quartet) is soulful in the best sense.

If the coupling suits then I doubt you'll be disappointed if your taste is inclined towards Tchaikovsky's classicism over his Russianism. Even so, I do think Pletnev is by quite a wide margin the more exciting performance of the symphony and his disc offers the radically different first version of the first movement as a fascinating comparison – a comparison that leaves one in no doubt that the discipline of form was always Tchaikovsky's priority.

Edward Seckerson

Sym No 2 – selected comparison:

Russian Nat Orch, Pletnev (11/12) (PENT) PTC5186 382

Vivaldi

'Nuova Stagione'

Concertos – RV194; RV235; RV403; RV420; RV431; RV440; RV517; RV808

Gli Incogniti / Amandine Beyer *violin*

Zig-Zag Territoires © ZZT310 (74) • DDD



Beyer's 'new seasons' and the first recording of RV194

Like the sun on Monet's haystacks or Rouen Cathedral, Vivaldi's genius shone on his own conception of the Baroque concerto so as to subtly alter its colour and texture while leaving the basic shape intact. So you could think of violinist Amandine Beyer, her chamber outfit Gli Incogniti and the musicologist who prepared the performing editions, Olivier Fourès, as a kind of compound Monet, painting what they hear in Vivaldi's music in rich yet precisely deployed colours. Two concertos for violin and organ bookend two violin concertos,

two cello concertos and two flute concertos (not in that order); the forces more or less resemble a string quartet with continuo and the occasional use of bassoon. The resulting sonority, the base colour of which is altered by the use of harpsichord or organ, theorbo or Baroque guitar, is light and transparent, offsetting the extraordinary intensity of the performances themselves.

Beyer herself is quite something. Listen to the violin concerto RV194, which here receives its world premiere recording – the incisive bowing, the sharply delineated phrasing, the crisp dance of the left-hand fingers. Cellist Marco Ceccato is equally impressive – try the astonishingly virtuosic passages in the concluding *Allegro* of the cello concerto RV403. And while flautist Manuel Granatiero's passionate outbursts seem to be muted somewhat by the delicate nature of his transverse flute, organist Anna Fontana's sparkling dialogues with Beyer in the organ-and-violin concertos are exhilarating. A highly enjoyable release that shines a new light on an old master.

William Yeoman

Wolf-Ferrari

Violin Concerto, Op 26^a. Il campiello – Prelude.

Le donne curiose – Overture. L'amore medico – Overture. I quattro rusteghi – Intermezzo

^a**Benjamin Schmid** *violin*

Oviedo Philharmonic Orchestra / Friedrich Haider
Farao © B108069 (59) • DDD



Carl Flesch winner Schmid plays the Italian's concerto

Wolf-Ferrari's Violin Concerto, a late work, was written for the young American virtuoso Guila Bustabo, who had enjoyed a meteoric career in the 1930s. Bustabo, displaying a seemingly unworried disregard of the political implications of her actions, had no qualms about appearing in wartime Germany and in occupied France; the work's Munich premiere in January 1944 was followed shortly afterwards by a Paris performance under Mengelberg.

There is no hint in the music of the desperate times in which it was written. Wolf-Ferrari would appear to have fallen in love with Bustabo and the Concerto is by turns bright and ethereal, passionate and tender, as well as allowing full rein for Bustabo's virtuosity. The firmly tonal idiom would not have seemed controversial even in Wolf-Ferrari's heyday in the 1900s. It's melodious, appealing music, rhapsodic yet skilfully structured, except perhaps in the finale, where the witty, humorous Rondo (a little like Prokofiev but less acerbic) is interrupted by an over-long solo meditation on the themes of the first movement. The

album is sumptuously produced, with a supporting DVD and many photos and facsimiles. And the music is performed with persuasive conviction, helped by a recording that brings out the beauty of Wolf-Ferrari's orchestral writing. Benjamin Schmid is a wonderfully eloquent advocate for the Concerto, evoking the intense, romantic aura of the initial bond between composer and violinist. And the short orchestral pieces, given lively, graceful performances, take us back to the happier times when Wolf-Ferrari achieved his first successes. **Duncan Druce**

'American Violin Concertos'

Barber Violin Concerto, Op 14^a **Menotti** Violin

Concerto^a **Wiprud** Violin Concerto, 'Katrina'^b

Ittai Shapira *violin* ^b**Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra** / **Neil Thomson**; ^a**Russian Philharmonic Orchestra** / **Thomas Sanderling**

Champs Hill © CHRCD043 (79) • DDD



Three US concertos from violinist-composer Shapira

For some years Menotti's Violin Concerto, along with his other purely instrumental works, was neglected. The first recording, with Tossy Spivakovsky, appeared in 1955, then Walter Verdehr contributed to a modern revival on Crystal Records 42 years later. He worked with Menotti, who said: 'An impeccable and moving performance that, for a change, made me enjoy my own music.' This may reflect the way the composer was pilloried by the New York critics for his old-fashioned music. It doesn't matter now – several fine recordings followed in the 2000s – and the elegant thematic structure of the Menotti is as satisfying as the evergreen Barber.

Theodore Wiprud, now in his mid-fifties, is director of education at the New York Philharmonic. This is his first concerto, written for Shapira, and it's subtitled *Katrina* to commemorate the 2005 hurricane disaster in New Orleans. The first movement opens with a celebration of the types of music associated with the city's rich cultural mix – bar-room piano, a walking bass and abrupt style modulations. The last two movements are based on songs with local associations, the one elegiac, the other celebratory. There are some ingenious things in the score but it too often sounds like a film soundtrack.

Shapira's rich tonal variety is amply displayed in all three works, everything well recorded. Even though the pace in Barber's slow movement is set by his favourite instrument, the oboe, Shapira takes admirable command in this vintage Barber – and the finale is stunning.

Peter Dickinson

Menotti – selected comparisons:

Spivakovsky, Boston SO, Munch (NAXO) 8 111376/7

Verdehr, Martinů PO, Trevor (CRYS) CRYSTALCD514

Chamber



Rob Cowan reviews Dvořák from Teo Gheorghiu and the Carmina Quartet:
'In this repertoire, competition is simply too hot for the survival of anything less than the fittest'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 58**



Nalen Anthoni reviews Mozart's Quintet on a reconstructed basset:
'Notes are leant into rather than forced, with tempi and dynamics regulated to suit the phraseology'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 60**

JS Bach • Beethoven

JS Bach Solo Violin Partita No 2, BWV1004

Beethoven Violin Sonata No 9, 'Kreutzer', Op 47

Brahms Hungarian Dance No 1 (trans Joachim)

Wieniawski Scherzo-Tarantelle, Op 16

Maxim Vengerov *vn* **Itamar Golan** *pf*

Wigmore Hall Live WHLIVE0056 (80' • DDD)

Recorded live, April 5, 2012



Vengerov's return to Wigmore Hall caught live

It may look on the outside like a bit of a pops disc (best-known Bach and Beethoven, and white-knuckle showpieces by Brahms and Wieniawski), but the programme for Maxim Vengerov's first recital at Wigmore Hall in almost 20 years, and his return to recording as a violinist after five years of conducting, gives an intriguing insight into what makes a good – or great – violinist. However, it's hard to know who – the audience, or Vengerov himself – benefits more from the renewal of perspective that this sabbatical has brought. The playing throughout this disc is vastly sinuous; and though this may not be a seismic shift from his previous style, there is still a sense that he's shed the need to sound merely pretty in order to get closer to the scale and importance of the music.

This is a good thing, but nevertheless has a tendency to turn all pieces in the recital, not just the Brahms and Wieniawski (and it's hard to imagine who else could play the latter with such nonchalant accuracy), into the sort of showpieces they might not be. The flashy opening to the Beethoven, for instance, may be well suited to that kind of treatment, whereas the tentative and unpretentious theme of the variations that form the second movement is not. The Bach is all about the sound: it's recorded surprisingly close, which gives an ethereal quality that matches Vengerov's sensuous playing – which also is 'all about the sound'. He chases the aural qualities of the violin that are enabled by Bach's notes, rather than using the limitless potential of the violin to bring out Bach's melodies and internal lines. So be warned: this performance is Bach (and Beethoven, for that matter) for the heart, not the brain. Be sure which camp you're in, and that it's strong enough, before you proceed with caution. **Caroline Gill**



All about the sound: the return of Maxim Vengerov

Barber • Pfitzner • Weill

Barber Cello Sonata, Op 6 **Pfitzner** Cello Sonata, Op 1
Weill Cello Sonata

Quirine Viersen *vc* **Silke Avenhaus** *pf*
Et cetera KTC1315 (71' • DDD)



Dutch-German duo profile composers in their youth

At first glance, these three composers appear to have little in common. However, the sonatas are all early works, written while the composers were still students; and they share an intense, youthful ardour.

The Pfitzner impresses by its command of form: its tonal structures and contrapuntal textures are worthy of Brahms, the main sign of immaturity being the lack of continuity between the intensely serious first two movements and the burlesque character of the *scherzo* and finale. In the *scherzo*, more a piano solo than a duo piece, Silke Avenhaus grasps her opportunities with panache and style; elsewhere, the playing is notable for the close, easy co-operation between the two artists.

By 1920 Weill had adopted an intensely chromatic idiom, firmly anchored, however, by a relatively straightforward rhythmic and metrical structure. The sonata is introspective in mood, yet with some highly imaginative lighter touches. Avenhaus and Viersen find considerable variety of colour, seizing on the finale's grotesque character before enjoying its tranquil, impressionistic coda, like a calm sunset after a stormy day.

The performance of Barber's Sonata makes an interesting contrast with the magnificent 1979 live recording by Charles Curtis and Earl Wild, especially in the first movement. Here, Curtis and Wild pace themselves more broadly, emphasising the eloquent gestures, whereas Viersen and Avenhaus concentrate on a passionate forward motion. Both approaches seem valid to me, and, indeed, I can thoroughly recommend all the playing on this disc – assured, intelligent and deeply felt.

Duncan Druce

Barber – selected comparison:

Curtis, Wild (2/04) (IVOR) IVCD73003

Beethoven

'Complete Piano Trios, Vol 2'

Piano Trios – WoO38; Op 1 No 3; Op 70 No 2

Gould Trio

Somm Céleste ㊦ SOMMCD0120 (76' • DDD)

Recorded live at St George's, Bristol, December 7, 2011



Disc two in the Goulds' live Beethoven cycle

I was very taken with the first instalment of the Gould Trio's live Beethoven cycle, captured at St George's, Brandon Hill. In Vol 2 they once again present a varied programme juxtaposing early and mature trios.

The charm of WoO38 is persuasively conveyed, with the group playing up the work's *galant* origins. Their conversational ease in the opening movement works well, and theirs is a more elegant view of the *Scherzo* than that of the Wanderer and Florestan Trios, who make more of its skittishness, emphasising the contrast with the smoother Trio section.

The key of C minor always inspired something very special in Beethoven. In the earlier works, such as the third of the Op 1 Trios, it drew from him writing of tremendous power and vehemence. If Trio Wanderer's pianist Vincent Coq is a degree more effortless in the virtuosic passagework of the *Allegro con brio*, the Gould Trio are compelling in the variation-form *Andante cantabile*. In the *scherzo* (misleadingly labelled *Menuetto*) I missed the coiled energy of the Wanderer and Florestan (more to do with tautness of phrasing than tempo), though the Gould are wonderfully sinuous in the more lyrical moments. Overall, though, no one captures the work's iconoclastic qualities better than Staier, Sepec and Queyras, from their shaded opening to the violently driven *Prestissimo* finale.

The Gould's sensitive opening to the Op 70 No 2 Trio doesn't quite match the sense of mystery attained by the Beaux Arts, while the Florestan and Wanderer are higher in energy in the following *Allegro*. But the Gould find a good balance of charm and drama in the double-variation second movement, and the *Allegretto* has a simple songfulness that is most affecting.

There are more dramatic readings of these works around but these performances are unfailingly musicianly, complemented by an unobtrusive audience, good balance and fine booklet-notes from Robert Matthew-Walker.

Harriet Smith

Selected comparisons:

Beaux Arts Trio (11/83⁸, 3/92⁸) (PHIL) 468 4112PB5

Florestan Trio (3/03⁸, 6/04⁸, 12/04⁸) (HYPE) CDS44471/4

Trio Wanderer (7/12) (HARM) HMC90 2100/03

Op 1 No 3 – selected comparison:

Staier, Sepec, Queyras (3/08) (HARM) HMC90 1955

Beethoven

Complete Violin Sonatas

Leonidas Kavakos *vn* Enrico Pace *pf*

Decca ㊦ ㊢ 478 3523DH3 (3h 56' • DDD)



First release from Kavakos as Decca artist

Beethoven wrote 10 sonatas for pianoforte and violin. It seems perverse of Decca to market this set with just Kavakos's photo on the cover, suggesting Enrico Pace – whose name appears in much smaller letters than Kavakos's – to be an also-ran. True, Kavakos is the well-known name, but why not treat it as an opportunity to promote Pace, who certainly doesn't play like a 'mere accompanist'?

This is a notably well-played set, and Pace and Kavakos have considered deeply how to present Beethoven's ideas in the clearest, most vivid way. Phrases are precisely articulated, the dynamic shapes and stress points brought into clear focus. The pair are prepared to allow time to make these expressive points, introducing, for instance, small gaps before Beethoven's many *sforzandos*; and they're ready to change the tempo within a movement in order to bring out a change in expressive character. Thus the first movement of Op 30 No 1 starts unusually slowly, to emphasise the smooth, calm contrapuntal lines, then speeds up as the music becomes livelier. Most of these adaptations are smoothly and expertly managed but the build-up of expressive hesitations does on occasion undermine the music's momentum. The middle movement of Op 23, hovering between *andante* and *allegretto*, sounds far more fun in Ibragimova and Tiberghien's live recording; by comparison, Kavakos and Pace seem somewhat stiff.

In the most lively or dramatic movements – the first *allegros* of Op 30 Nos 2 and 3, the finale of Op 12 No 3, the first movement of the *Kreutzer* Sonata – Kavakos and Pace are at their best, rivalling the finest recordings. There is a recurring sense, however, that the playing is slightly over-literal. For example, when Beethoven writes, as he so often does, a *crescendo* leading to a sudden *piano*, it may be more appropriate to shade into the softness at the last moment, rather than give the music a sudden jolt.

I find a lot to admire and enjoy in these performances, but of recent recordings I'm more inclined to recommend the imaginative, searching accounts by Isabelle Faust and Alexander Melnikov or the delightfully spontaneous-sounding set by Alina Ibragimova and Cédric Tiberghien. **Duncan Druce**

Selected comparisons:

Faust, Melnikov (10/10) (HARM) HMC90 2025/7

Ibragimova, Tiberghien (8/10, 12/10, 7/11)

(WIGM) WHLIVE0036, 0041 & 0045

GRAMOPHONE *Archive*

Beethoven's violin sonatas

In 2010 Capuçon and Braley recorded the Beethoven sonatas. Here's what we said



NOVEMBER 2010

Beethoven Complete Violin Sonatas

Renaud Capuçon *vn* Frank Braley *pf*

Virgin Classics ㊦ ㊢ 642001-0 (3h 44' • DDD)

Where Isabelle Faust and Alexander Melnikov (Harmonia Mundi, 10/10) place Beethoven beneath the spotlight of their pooled intelligence, whether playful, thoughtful or subtly provocative, Renaud Capuçon and Frank Braley eschew the bright lights for a place where mellowness, intimacy and relative refinement are more obvious priorities. These are among the smoothest and most beautiful-sounding Beethoven duo-sonata performances to have come my way in recent years, and I could hardly quote a more telling example of their style than the unhurried opening of Sonata No 10, Capuçon's trill a gentle tremor, then the second subject, genial but quietly insistent. The 'traditional' warmth that informs these performances is further exemplified at the start of the slow movement, where Braley's chords project with ample though never overbearing tone. The tiny *Scherzo* is marked, initially, by an almost imperceptible sense of equivocation, and likewise the less mercurial *Scherzo* of Sonata No 7, a work where yearning (the first movement's second subject) draws level with the expected sense of drama.

The duo's underplayed romanticism is well illustrated in the *Spring* Sonata (note Capuçon's lightly flicked interjections at around 0'53" into the finale) and, as with Faust and Melnikov, the *Kreutzer* Sonata is sensibly paced, one of its high points being the slow movement's penultimate variation, where Capuçon's initial statement uses very little vibrato, making the more vibrant repeat doubly effective (a ploy that occurs quite a few times throughout the set). How elegant, too, the movement's closing variation, a perfect point of contrast for the thunderous chord that opens the finale.

The earlier sonatas come off equally well, with the soloists interweaving unselfconsciously, their phrases anticipating or mirroring each other as they should – in the finale of Sonata No 2, for example, at around 2'24", the questioning development, followed by some light-hearted badinage. It's chamber-music playing of the highest order, less intense and outspoken overall than Faust and Melnikov which, given one's milder moods, will occasionally work to its advantage, though that's not in any way to belittle the rival team's considerable achievement. So, rest assured, if you've already invested in their set you shouldn't feel wrong-footed. Virgin's sound is very well balanced.

Rob Cowan

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The Danish String Quartet convey an air of film-star energy

Brahms • Haydn

Brahms String Quartet No 2, Op 51 No 2

Haydn String Quartet, 'Lark', Op 64 No 5

Danish Quartet

C-Avi Music © AVI8553264 (48' • DDD)



The Danish Quartet compare and contrast Haydn and Brahms

The cover of this disc looks a bit like a blond (with hair product) *Reservoir Dogs*, and there's certainly an air of film-star energy to this recording. Although they have been around for a surprisingly long time, the Danish String Quartet (formerly known as the Young Danish String Quartet) still have the puppyish energy they had 11 years ago, but now that enthusiasm has the lustre of maturity that was missing in their earliest recordings of the Nielsen quartets for Kontrapunkt (10/93). Their recording of Haydn's *Lark* Quartet and the tense, Beethoven-influenced Op 51 A minor Quartet of Brahms compares and contrasts one of Haydn's best-known chamber works with one of Brahms's less popular pieces.

These works are both virtuoso in their own way, though the Haydn is more overt in its technical demands; and in particular here, the slightly staid accompaniment of the finale is given its own validity and bounce by the energy with which it is played, and even gives the

phosphorescent top line under which it sits extra momentum as a result. The overarching feeling one gets when listening to the Haydn is of light and space – a sense that is carried over to the Brahms, but perhaps with less reason. There are points in the latter, particularly in the *Andante*, when the harmony and inner parts move with such intense direction by way of yearning melody, harmonic dissonance and resolution that the music cries out for a more sustained approach than the Danish Quartet seem willing to give it. There is, though, a deliciously discombobulating lack of pulse in the opening of the first movement, which takes so long to shake off once it has righted itself that you really are compelled to listen with keener ears, which is ultimately what this work really needs. **Caroline Gill**

Dvořák

Piano Quintet No 2, Op 81 B155^{*}.

String Quartet No 12, 'American', Op 96 B179

^aTeo Gheorghiu *pf* Carmina Quartet

Sony Classical © 88725 47948-2 (67' • DDD)



Liszt Competition winner joins Swiss quartet for Dvořák

Interesting as these performances occasionally are, they lack conviction because their mannerisms too often prove conspicuous. The Quintet's broad opening, which should

smile, is doleful, and when the *Allegro* flies in on its tail the effect is disturbingly abrupt. Teo Gheorghiu's little linking solo is too fussy, the first subject proper laboured. In the *Dumka* second movement, tempo relations are less than fluid and at 5'08" there's an added note that I've never heard before (maybe a textual anomaly?). The *Scherzo*'s Trio plods, at least to start with, and I can't quite work out what has happened at the very start of the *American* Quartet's *Lento*, where the notation appears to have been tweaked.

These and other minor oddities could be glossed over were the performances themselves more compelling, but in this repertoire, competition is simply too hot for the survival of anything less than the fittest. András Schiff and the Panocha Quartet also have some individual touches up their sleeves (Schiff wouldn't be Schiff without them) but their 1997 Teldec version of the Quintet is far more successful – more natural – than the version under review. Just as good, and from three years earlier, is the Panocha's Supraphon recording with the peerless Jan Panenka: admittedly one of the more relaxed options – genial, sensitively phrased and profoundly musical. As to the *American*, we're spoilt for choice, but for those intent on collecting a complete quartet cycle, the recently released Vogler Quartet version on CPO (part of a double-pack that also includes Opp 34, 47 and 51) is highly competitive. Then

there are the Prague, Panocha, Pavel Haas quartets...and on it goes. **Rob Cowan**

Pf Qnt – selected comparisons:

Schiff, Panocha Qt (7/99) (WARN) 2564 60336-2

Panenka, Panocha Qt (SUPR) 11 1465-2

American Stg Qt – selected comparisons:

Panocha Qt (2/96) (SUPR) SU0179-2

Pavel Haas Qt (12/10) (SUPR) SU4038-2

Prague Qt (DG) 463 165-2GB9

Vogler Qt (CPO) 777 624-2

Dvořák

Piano Quartet No 2, Op 87 B162.

Piano Quintet No 2, Op 81 B155^a.

Songs My Mother Taught Me, Op 55 B104 No 4

Schubert Ensemble

Chandos © CHAN10719 (76' • DDD)



30-year-old Schubert Ensemble tackle Dvořák for Chandos

Performers of Dvořák, especially his large-scale forms, seem to face more pressing questions of tempo than when playing other 'standard' Romantic repertoire. How deftly, for example, does the composer move in the *Lento* of the Op 87 Piano Quartet between the yearning cello melody and its more agitated countersubject? Performers must follow suit, perhaps judging their response more by mood than by literal fidelity without slipping into the kind of rhythmic sloppiness that can deprive the composer of his special inflection. The *Dumka* of the Piano Quintet is an even more pertinent case in point, explicitly moving away from and back towards its initial *Andante con moto* four times with an expressive flexibility that demands as much alertness from performers as do Beethoven's own late slow movements.

Happily, the Schubert Ensemble meet Dvořák on his own terms; no mean feat given the previous dominance in this repertoire of home-grown musicians. The mixed make-up of the ensemble may be important in this regard, for these are emphatically not recordings made by a pianist and a string quartet. Both William Howard and the Chandos engineers appear acutely aware of the inherent balance problems in this music and overcome them more completely than any other recording I've heard. The sound is full and full-frontal, but then your listening room isn't Wigmore Hall, where the ensemble often play, and it suits these pertly articulated performances which are always on the qui vive for chances to sing and to dance. This an unqualified delight. **Peter Quantrill**

Eno

'Lux'

Brian Eno *Insts/elects*

Warp © WARPCD231 (76' • DDD)



Extended work 'Lux' forms Eno's first solo album for Warp

I wouldn't, if I were you, try to experience *Lux* as music. Brian Eno, the 'composer' (I'm not certain if this is the right label for him) of this 76-minute electronic soundscape, is more interested in intelligent design than intuitive composition, in motion than emotion. And yet other reviews I've read insist on assessing *Lux* as though Eno's trying to further the aesthetic purview of Bruckner, or Derek Bailey, and falling short. Here's the truth: *Lux* to its core fulfils the remit of 'ambient' music, the term Eno coined for now-classic mid-'70s albums such as 'Music for Airports' and 'Discreet Music', which fused the principles of Satie's furniture music with Kraftwerk's approach to synthesiser technology, via Cage and minimalism.

These sounds are designed to surround you in a warm embrace; if you fell asleep for 20 minutes then drifted back in, Eno wouldn't mind. Shimmering and bobbing around space like oil dispersing through water, little groups of chiming piano notes do a slow dance, held in position by feathery electronic drones. But even if the land of nod does temporarily claim you, you wouldn't lose your place because there's no narrative thread to lose. *Lux* circles the continuous present; and even when there is a discernable shift in texture, such as at 19'24", when guitar sounds diplomatically nudge keyboards to one side, the prevailing mood music is sustained.

As befits sonic design, the production values are immaculate. The inconvenience of needing to deal with 'music' is for Eno, one senses, merely a way of having material to work up in a studio. The detail lavished on each emerging motif – its glacial journey through the sound environment and internal harmonic spectra – is as meticulous an approach to soundscaping as you'll hear. His detractors say fair do's, but Eno is all production and no content, event or soul. But pointing out that Andy Warhol's soup tins are useless as a depiction of water lilies never got anyone very far. Eno makes us think again about the nature of sound as music, or not – and that's fine. **Philip Clark**

Fauré

Piano Quintets – No 1, Op 89; No 2, Op 115

Eric Le Sage *pf* Ebène Quartet

Alpha © ALPHA602 (66' • DDD)



French pianist Le Sage joins compatriots Ebène in quintets

Eric Le Sage continues his Fauré exploration (I much liked the piano quartets – 10/12) with the two quintets. Both are late masterpieces, the Second the more approachable of the two, while the First stands on the cusp of middle and late and abounds in constantly shifting tonal centres and melodies that seem to slip, ungraspably, through your fingers. This is the most fragile of musical discourses, so easily wounded if the performers aren't completely at one with the idiom. In that respect, the Ebène Quartet are,

of course, past masters. In fact, this recording was made just weeks after their contributions to Virgin's Fauré box (with two different pianists: Michel Dalberto in No 1 and Nicholas Angelich in No 2). That was one of the more successful discs in a distinctly mixed bag that was on the whole compromised by the recording quality.

Comparison is fascinating. Unsurprisingly, the performances don't differ markedly in terms of tempo or interpretation, but the devil's in the detail, and this is where this set wins out time and again. The most obvious plus is that the recording itself has more clarity and you're more aware of the individual string players, a particular delight in the case of this fab four.

The opening of the Second Quintet's *Allegro vivo* is more withdrawn than elsewhere, without compromising on its thrilling momentum. And the slow movement comes off better, too, largely because the pianist is more integrated into the texture; in solemnity they give the London Bridge Ensemble a run for their money. Le Sage offers consistently limpid playing, so unmistakably French, whether in the many passages of virtuoso writing – sample the way he sets the scene in the opening movement of No 1 – or in the bell-like pealing of the finale of the same work. Everywhere the pacing sounds utterly natural: Le Sage and the Ebène are the most persuasive guides through sometimes daunting terrain. This is a clear front-runner in this repertoire. **Harriet Smith**

Selected comparison:

Ebène Qt, Dalberto, Angelich (12/11) (VIRG) 070875-2

Pf Qnt No 2 – selected comparison:

London Bridge Ens (1/13) (SONI) SON11203

Haydn

String Quartets – Op 20 No 4; 'Lark', Op 64 No 5; Op 76 No 1; Op 103

Endellion Quartet

Warner Classics © 2564 65720-7 (74' • DDD)



Endellion Quartet move from Beethoven to Haydn

There's always a feeling when listening to the Endellion Quartet that you're listening to the Urtext method of quartet playing. Maybe 30 years of playing together has brought a uniformity of thought and instinct to them as a group that allows them to play as a single entity; or maybe their unfussy, intellectual approach is particularly compatible with a genre that is, if done skilfully, a concentration of all the musical ideas of the composer.

Either way (or, more likely, both ways), the Endellion's playing is nearly always beyond reproach, and this contrasting array of Haydn's quartet styles and personalities is no exception. They bring out with very simple clarity all of Haydn's humour (his unexpected three-bar phrases in particular, which can leave you wondering whether the music is coming or

going), his partiality to gypsy dances, his ability to write melodies that are deeply affecting in their simplicity, and the mercuriality of his personality that is seen more often in his symphonies (particularly through his occasional unexpected key-changes). All this is imparted through an easy congeniality that plainly belies a minuteness in their study of the music. It would be exciting indeed if this were the first in a complete Haydn cycle, but even if it isn't, the beautifully balanced arguments of this optimistic disc are highly recommended.

Caroline Gill

Mozart

Clarinet Quintet, K581. Rondo, K581a (compl Levin). Allegro, K516c (compl Levin). Andante Rondo^a. Allegro, K580b^b (compl Beyer)

Colin Lawson *basset cl/abcl* ^bMichael Harris *basset-hn*

The Revolutionary Drawing Room

Clarinet Classics © CCO068 (60' • DDD)



Clarinet Quintet gets period treatment from Colin Lawson

Familiarity takes a knock. Colin Lawson begins his opening flourish of the Quintet on (written) C below middle C and not on G as is usually heard, even on a basset clarinet. Why so? Because he's using the latest reconstruction of the part – by Werner Breig (Breitkopf & Härtel, 2005) – as it might have been written for Anton Stadler's extended instrument. The autograph is lost, but Breig's logic is unassailable as the notes now match those of the second flourish an octave higher.

It's an enlightened beginning to an interpretation of distinction. Mozart's 'unplumbed melancholy underlying even his brightest and most vivacious moments' (WJ Turner) strikes a chord with Lawson and the Revolutionary Drawing Room. He draws from his basset (copy of a period model, as are the other clarinets used here) a woody tone of subtly varied hues, balanced with strings equally sensitive to the composer's skill in texturing. A transparent fabric, notes leant into rather than forced, and tempi and dynamics graduated to suit the phraseology form a foundation to a recreative process that spreads beyond the printed page.

Are Mozart's fragments snippets of pieces abandoned because they hadn't reached the standards he expected of himself? Perhaps; yet these completions may be experienced as intriguing (or contentious) confluences of Mozartian creativity and 20th-century intellect. Probably the most absorbing, and absorbingly played, is Franz Beyer's realisation of K580b for clarinet in C and basset-horn, though Duncan Druce's skills at conjecture also grace this work – as well as K516c. **Nalen Anthoni** K516c, K580b (both compl Druce) – selected comparison: Hacker, Schatzberger, Salomon Qt (AMON) CDSAR17

D Purcell

'The Unknown Purcell: Sonatas by Daniel Purcell' Chaconne in A minor. Rondeau in B flat. Solos – in A; in B minor; in D. Sonatas – in A; in A; in B minor; in D; in D; in F minor. Suite in D minor. Toccata in A minor. Alass when charming Sylvia's gon. Lovely Charmer. What ungrateful devil moves you

Hazel Brooks *vn* David Pollock *hpd*

Chandos Chaconne © CHAN0795 (76' • DDD)



All that survives of the younger Purcell's instrumental music

Daniel Purcell – who was younger than Henry Purcell and outlived him by more than 20 years and who, according to Peter Holman, was more likely to have been his cousin than his brother – was trained as a choirboy and organist but spent most of his career writing for the London stage (contributing music to some 40 productions) and for public concerts. Among his surviving works are his arrangements of theatre music for solo harpsichord, some of which found their way into popular published collections of the day, as well as his own edition of violin sonatas.

Although three of the six sonatas have been recorded before (Et cetera, 1999), most of the music on this disc, dating from the late 1690s and early 1700s, will be new to listeners and represents all that survives of his instrumental music. Charming if not memorable, most of the pieces are short and make relatively modest demands on the performers, so were probably intended mainly for private music-making.

In the booklet biographies, Hazel Brooks and David Pollock express their intention to develop performances that highlight the versatility of the harpsichord as the sole continuo instrument. This, however, has inclined them to go their separate ways: Brooks, who is an accomplished and knowledgeable performer, contributes remarkably straight-toned readings with minimal rhetoric and ornamentation, while Pollock pursues a more expressive and stylish approach, both as Brooks's accompanist and as a soloist. Are we to imagine, then, that we are listening to the shade of Daniel Purcell accompanying a private pupil? Novel, and undoubtedly with historical precedent; but not necessarily musically satisfying.

Julie Anne Sadie

Saariaho

Cendres^a. Cloud Trio^b. Je sens un deuxième cœur^c.

Mirage (chamber version)^d. Serenatas^e

^aPia Freund *sop* ^aMikael Helsvuo *alto fl* ^bErnst Kovacic *vn*

^{bc}Steven Dann *va* ^{abcde}Anssi Karttunen *vc*

^{acde}Tuija Hakkila *pf* ^eFlorent Jodelet *perc*

Ondine © ODE1189-2 (77' • DDD)



Trio disc continues Ondine's survey of the Finnish composer

Ondine's exploration of the luminescent sound world of Kaija Saariaho continues with

five trios for various combinations. All are in her familiar fluttery-ecstatic vein, derived from late Scriabin by way of Lutosławski and Crumb but with a harmonic sophistication and restraint that place her far above many contemporaries of whom much the same might be said.

Mirage is the chamber version of the mini-cantata to shaman texts already recorded in its orchestral guise (11/08); the two versions were composed in parallel and are equally haunting. *Cloud Trio* provokes comparisons with Ligeti and, notwithstanding its obvious evocative attractions, it did set me wondering whether the string trio medium is perhaps a little thin for Saariaho's purposes. Her natural idiom is all ripples, glides and shimmers, exploring resonances that become more potent when a piano or larger ensemble is involved.

This may be partly why I found my attention more consistently held by the mixed timbres of *Cendres*, with its asthmatic alto flute, and *Je sens un deuxième cœur*. The title of the latter refers to a pregnant woman's sensation of a second heart in her body and the music is related conceptually to Saariaho's second opera, *Adriana mater*.

Its frequently aggressive textures (the opera itself is set in a war zone) provide a welcome contrast to the relatively passive tone of the other pieces here.

In *Serenatas* the grit in the oyster is supplied by the percussion. Predominantly dark in tone, this suite's five movements can be performed in any order of the performers' choosing. Here the *Misterioso* makes a natural conclusion, both to the work and to the disc. Performances are uniformly first-rate and the recording is pretty much ideal. The CD is self-recommending to contemporary-music connoisseurs, but not exclusively to them. **David Fanning**

Weber

Six Violin Sonatas, Op 10. Piano Quartet, Op 8

Isabelle Faust *vn* Boris Faust *va* Wolfgang

Emanuel Schmidt *vc* Alexander Melnikov *pf*

Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2108 (70' • DDD)



Regular duo partners Faust and Melnikov record the sonatas

In the terminology of the time, these six Weber 'progressive' sonatas of 1810 are 'for piano with violin obbligato', but, if the piano does tend to take the upper hand, there would be some strange lacunae if the violin stopped playing. Here we are a long way from *Der Freischütz* and even further from *Euryanthe* and *Oberon*, all completed in the 1820s, but Weber's originality and Romantic leanings are already in evidence. This is all the more true of the B flat Piano Quartet of 1809, harking back to Classical models in certain respects but, in the slow movement particularly, striving for a mode of expression that would come to fruition in the operas.

The piano-writing in the sonatas is already prescient of the effervescent fun that Weber

would have in the F minor *Konzertstück* of 1821. The publisher who commissioned the sonatas rejected them because they were insufficiently dull, according to Weber; and when they eventually saw the light of day they were still described as being for amateurs. These would need to be advanced, agile amateurs, given the dazzle of some of the passagework, but – perhaps even more important – they would also need to have a developed aptitude for interpretation to bring out the music's diverse characteristics and spirit in a way that the performers on this disc so entertainingly and perceptively do. Alexander Melnikov, with exuberance and sensitivity, plays a fortepiano of about 1815, and Isabelle Faust (on a Stradivarius) is his lithe, discerning and thoroughly engaging companion. **Geoffrey Norris**

'A Bach Notebook for Trumpet'

CPE Bach Sonata, Wq65/17 H47 – 3rd movt

GH Bach So oft ich meine Tobackspfeife **JB Bach** Suite No 4 – La joye **J Christian Bach** Amadis des Gaules – Sinfonia **J Christoph Bach** Ich lasse dich nicht, BWV Anh159 **JCF Bach** Sonata, F X/2

JH Bach Sonata in F minor **JL Bach** Overture in G **JM Bach** Ach, wie sehnlich wart ich der Zeit

JS Bach An Wasserflüssen Babylon, BWV635b. Cantata No 68 – Wer an ihn glaubet. Cantata No 85 – Seht, was der Liebe tut. Cantata No 172 – Von Gott kömmt mir in Freudenschein. Concerto, BWV1055 – 3rd movt. English Suite No 2, BWV807 – Prelude. O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig, BWV656. O Mensch, bewein' dein Sünde Gross, BWV622. Prelude and Fugue, BWV541. Solo Cello Suite No 6 – Sarabande^a

WF Bach Polonaise No 10, Falck12

(arr Pienaar, ^aFryer)

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood tpt **Daniel-Ben Pienaar** pf
Linn (P) (CD) CKD418 (73' • DDD/DSD)



On trumpet, 11 Bachs spanning two centuries

That Johann Sebastian Bach was one of a large family of Bachs is well known, but this disc brings forward no fewer than 11 Bachs who flourished between 1615 and 1796. Aided by the young South African pianist Daniel-Ben Pienaar, who has made the arrangements, Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, distinguished academic (current principal of the Royal Academy of Music) as well as fellow critic on *Gramophone*, demonstrates his virtuosity on the trumpet. As he explains, the aim is to view all these 20 works through a 20th-century prism, 'dressing the music in new clothes', using instruments – valve trumpet and grand piano – unknown when most of this music was written.

The result is a lively romp, not at all like an academic exercise, with JSB standing out even above such brilliant sons as Carl Philipp Emanuel and Johann Christian. These three are the only ones who transcend their

respective periods, JSB monumentally so; but as presented here, all these Bachs emerge freshly with plenty to say, whether reflecting the period of Monteverdi and the Gabriellis or that of the Baroque.

The quality that runs consistently through these performances is vigour, with rhythmic bite in sprung rhythms. Not that it is a disc to play in one sitting, for the ripe sound of the trumpet, as recorded in the helpful acoustic of St George's, Brandon Hill, Bristol does tend to get overpowering. That's the only reservation about a disc that brings to life all 11 Bachs, with their sequence of confusingly similar names. A totally refreshing disc. **Edward Greenfield**

'Pavane'

Debussy Clair de lune. La fille aux cheveux de lin

Dubugnon Incantatio, Op 12b. Lied, Op 44b

Fauré Après un rêve, Op 7 No 1. Elégie, Op 24.

Pavane, Op 50. Romance, Op 69

Ravel Pavane pour une infante défunte

Maxim Rysanov va **Ashley Wass** pf

BIS (P) (CD) BIS1773 (53' • DDD/DSD)

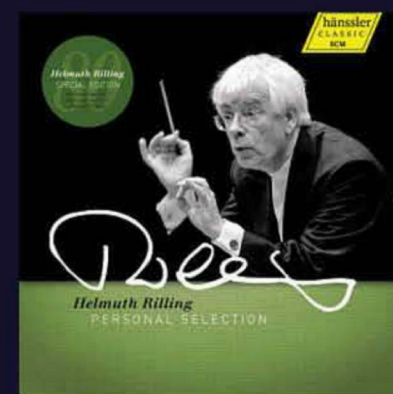


French Romantics arranged for Maxim Rysanov's viola

That this programme of arrangements is so thoroughly enjoyable is due largely to the quality of the performances. Maxim Rysanov is a remarkable string player; in his hands the viola's distinctive voice is explored throughout its range, with consistently beautiful variations of intensity and tone colour. And he and Wass show great sensitivity in finding the appropriate tempo and character for each item.

The arrangements aren't all completely successful. I find those of Debussy and Ravel, made by Vadim Borisovsky, to be unnecessarily elaborate, with changes of register, viola harmonics and so on. 'Clair de lune', especially, would be better served by a simpler transcription. At the other end of the scale, the items by Richard Dubugnon are reworkings by the composer himself of works originally conceived for the cello (*Incantatio*) and the double bass (*Lied*) and sound entirely convincing in their new setting. The Swiss-born Dubugnon's music often has an impressionistic character and so fits in well with the earlier music on the disc; something that Janine Jansen's album 'Beau soir' (Decca, 11/10), on which Dubugnon appears in a similar context, has already demonstrated. However, listeners hoping to use this disc as gentle background music will certainly be startled by the ferocity of the dissonant climaxes in the second and third movements of *Incantatio* – though these find a parallel in the intense passion unleashed during the Fauré *Elégie*. For me, the highlights of the disc are the Fauré pieces, which are so effective in these interpretations that one wishes he'd written original music for viola and piano. **Duncan Druce**

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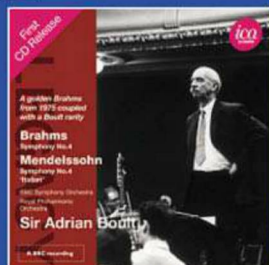
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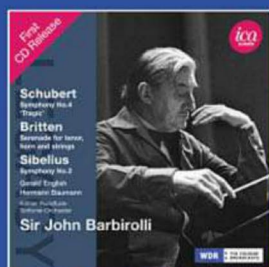
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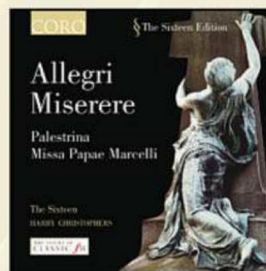
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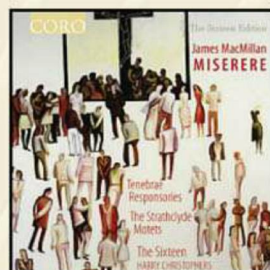
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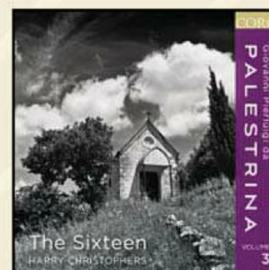
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MUSIC OF THE ANTIPODES

William Yeoman introduces a selection of discs that demonstrate the growing confidence of Australian and New Zealand composers



The Australian Benaud Trio offer superb performances on their debut disc

Australian and New Zealand classical music is to a certain extent about a dialogue with Western European art music on the one hand and the music of indigenous cultures on the other. Between these two dialogues lies the essential confrontation with the landscape. Peter Sculthorpe comes most readily to mind as an Australian composer who typifies an ongoing conversation with all three. 'I'm passionate about the landscape, and I've always sought to find the sacred in it,' he once told me. 'To do that without taking any notice of indigenous music would be rather foolish because that music was shaped for many thousands of years by the land.'

Like Sculthorpe, New Zealand composers often avail themselves of the resources of both the music and the instruments of their indigenous culture. Three recent releases from the prolific New Zealand label Atoll feature the use of *taonga pūoro* or 'singing treasures'. 'Puhake ki te rangi' showcases the chamber music of **Gillian Karawe Whitehead**, a fourth-generation *pākehā* (European New Zealander) with Maori ancestry, as well as the extraordinary playing of *taonga pūoro* specialist Richard Nunns. With the New Zealand String Quartet, flautist Alexa Still and the seven-part ensemble Tuhonohono, Nunns plays a range of instruments including the bird caller, bullroarer, different varieties of *pūtōrino*, shell trumpets, nose flutes, swung gourds and the like. Whitehead's music is textured, sensitively

coloured and haunting. Included is a DVD of the title-work.

Nunns also pops up on 'Toru: Chamber Music by **Martin Lodge**'. Lodge is currently associate professor of music at the University of Waikato in Hamilton and his music is by turns lyrical, ecstatic and admitting of a flexible chiaroscuro. Included are such works as *Epitaph for Douglas Lilburn* for solo cello, *Aequora tuta silent* for saxophone, viola and electronic effects, *Voices Within* for harpsichord and recorded sound, and *Toru* for clarinet, cello and *taonga pūoro*.

The colourful and unashamedly tonal orchestral canvases of **Eve de Castro-Robinson**, who teaches composition at the University of Auckland, are inflected by the flora and fauna of the New Zealand landscape rather than overtly using indigenous music and its instruments. 'Releasing the Angel' features five works including *Peregrinations* for piano and orchestra, and *Len Dances*, a quirky piece featuring the sounds of the kinetic sculptures of Len Lye. The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra under Kenneth Young perform solidly throughout.

There are a number of Australian composers whose chamber music sounds distinctively Australian. **Nigel Westlake** and **Ross Edwards** are foremost among them; others, such as **Paul Stanhope** and **Matthew Hindson**, are more in the Western European mould while still striving for an individual voice. The music of Edwards, Stanhope and Hindson features on two recent releases.

On 'String Lines', featuring the fine **Elektra Quartet**, I particularly enjoyed the rhythmic vitality of Westlake's *High Tension Wires* and Edwards's *Chorale and Ecstatic Dance*. On their (self-titled) debut disc, the **Benaud Trio** perform piano trios by Edwards, Stanhope and Hindson; the music is solid and distinctive, the performances superb.

The **Australian Voices** offer an attractive programme of choral music, much of it written or arranged by its protean music director, Gordon Hamilton. Hamilton's *Toy Story 3 = Awesome! (The Facebook Song)*, which 'simultaneously ridicules and celebrates user-generated content', is a real hoot. But of especial interest here are Australian indigenous dijeridu player and composer William Barton's *Kalkadunga Yurdu* and Robert Davidson's electroacoustic *We Apologise*, which uses text taken from former Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd's 2008 speech in which he apologised to Australian Aborigines for past wrongs. The youthful Australian Voices are well drilled and boast a crisp, resonant delivery of the sonic goods under Hamilton's confident direction.

If Antipodean modernism was a dead end because of a superficial form-without-content grafting-on of a European sensibility, the Australian and New Zealand art music of the last few decades is much more responsive to the balance between local contexts and individual expressive ends regardless of style. These six releases together form a snapshot of a vital and distinctive musical scene which will continue to develop in new directions while taking account of old traditions. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Whitehead 'Puhake ki te rangi'
Nunns, New Zealand Qt, Tuhonohono et al
Atoll © 2 (CD + DVD) ACD107



Lodge Toru - Chbr Wks
Various artists
Atoll © ACD143



de Castro-Robinson 'Releasing the Angel'
New Zealand SO / K Young, et al
Atoll © ACD141



Various Cpsrs 'String Lines'
Elektra Qt
ABC Classics © ABC476 5039

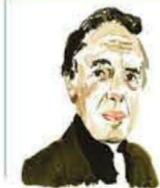


Various Cpsrs Pf Trios
Benaud Trio
Melba © MR301139



Various Cpsrs Chor Wks
Australian Voices / G Hamilton
Warner Classics © 2564 65486-0

Instrumental



Bryce Morrison on Mompou from Brazilian pianist Iruzun:

'Nothing is forced or exaggerated. It is as if she is sharing a special love with a small circle of intimate friends' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 67**



Jed Distler reviews Perahia's complete Sony recordings:

'Perahia's musicianship and virtuosity have remained remarkably consistent over the past four decades' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**

JS Bach

Six English Suites, BWV806-811

Richard Egarr *hpd*

Harmonia Mundi ® ② HMU90 7591/2 (81' • DDD)



Purcell, Couperin and now Bach from Egarr's harpsichord

After robust, earthy Purcell and delicately characterful Louis Couperin, Richard Egarr's *Bach English Suites* are carefully controlled, polished, thoughtful and reserved. The effect is rather like a thin coat of varnish over a picture in which every detail of light and shadow has been finely balanced. Compared with earlier Egarr recordings, these discs may suggest a downsizing of his keyboard personality in favour of readings that serve Bach and the listener without any intrusion of idiosyncrasy.

Egarr's tempi can be recommended as canonical to students of this music. His preludes unfold with excitement and virtuosity but never feel rushed or forced; his allemandes walk with a stately but never pompous or languorous pace; his courantes have a wholesome vitality but never run away in a frenzy; and his sarabandes are spacious without succumbing to morbid introspection. Ornamentation is generally light, precise and unfussy, if sometimes, as in the too frequent addition of simple passing tones in several repeats, not altogether imaginative.

So what's going on here? Egarr's short booklet essay notes the somewhat orphaned character of the *English Suites* within the larger Bach keyboard oeuvre: they suffer in comparison to the 'amazing musical megaliths' of the *Goldberg Variations*, the *Partitas* and *The Art of Fugue*. But he likes them for their pure keyboard delight and inexhaustible imagination.

And yet, in his proper, meticulous and thoroughly attentive readings, he seems to be making a case for their inclusion among the megaliths. Compare Egarr to other players, Christine Jaccottet (Denon), say, and you hear a determined inclination to self-control. Gustav Leonhardt's readings of the same suites (Sony, 10/97) are more magisterial, quirky and wild than his one-time student.

But as Egarr's traversal of all six suites unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that his

approach isn't about self denial or lack of ideas. Rather, it is part of a slowly cumulative reading that builds and climaxes in the Sixth Suite, with its sprawling, organ-like Prelude and dignified yet passionate Sarabande. Egarr's expressive powers, his careful use of small agogic accents, his clarity of line, all come together in something broader and grander, yet essentially connected to everything that has come before.

The parameters of expression for any one suite, or any one movement within a suite, have been adjusted to fit within a larger schematic sense of the *English Suites*, which taken together approach Mahlerian length. It would be a mistake to recommend playing the last suite first. But for listeners struggling to find what they most admire in Egarr's playing in the somewhat muted earlier movements, the advice is simple: hold on, it will all make sense.

Philip Kennicott

JS Bach

Keyboard Partitas - No 2, BWV826;

No 6, BWV830. Toccata, BWV911

David Fray *pf*

Virgin Classics ® 070944-2 (66' • DDD)



Fray follows concertos with solo Bach for Virgin

The virtues of David Fray's 2007 D major Partita and D minor *French Suite* recording (7/07) are present in his most recent solo foray into Bach's music. His C minor Partita (No 2) stands out for its diversified articulations and sensitive melodic pointing, although back-to-back comparisons reveal stronger polyphonic give and take between the hands from Murray Perahia and Andrés Schiff in his ECM remake. However, Fray's upbeat and playful romp through the final two movements might be described as a leaner, more line-oriented Argerich.

Fray also digs deepest in the E minor Partita's Sarabande, spinning out the long lines as if they were a vocal aria in one of the Passions. Indeed, the split-second timing and almost disembodied timbre he brings to the soft dotted chords are worth this CD's full list price. His remaining movements don't quite match the Sarabande's rarefied level: compare, for

example, Fray's slightly dragging, uneventful final Gigue alongside Perahia's more shapely, urgent inflections of the main theme or Hewitt's lilting transparency throughout and you'll hear what I mean.

However, Fray is at his consistent best in his forward-moving, assiduously unified and gorgeously controlled C minor Toccata, crowned by an intelligently shaped fugal finale that retains its buoyancy and momentum without the least slowing down or thickening. The booklet-notes arguably overestimate Fray's stature as a Bach interpreter, yet they offer succinct and detailed musical descriptions. The bright, resonant and clear engineering also deserves praise. **Jed Distler**

Partitas - selected comparisons:

Hewitt (6/97) (HYPE) CDA67191/2

Perahia (7/08) (SONY) 88697 40083-2, 88697 56560-2

Schiff (12/09) (ECM) 476 6991

Britten

Solo Cello Suites - No 1, Op 72;

No 2, Op 80; No 3, Op 87

Philip Higham *vc*

Delphian ® DCD34125 (69' • DDD)



YCAT cellist Higham plays Britten's Bach homage

A particular coup of this disc is the booklet-note. That may be an odd place for a review to start but the Britten scholar Paul Kildea has always written in a way that illuminates Britten's social, personal and political contexts so engagingly as to make it impossible for even the most hardened Britten sceptics not to open their minds to his music as a worthwhile artistic pursuit. His account of Britten's meeting with Rostropovich and their subsequent musical collaboration, which began with the Cello Sonata (which Philip Higham has also recorded - Sonimage, 12/12), makes it much easier than usual to forget the rush in which the Suites were written and see them as a representation of an important friendship and marriage of cultures, and a tapestry of Britten's own compositional journey.

But it is Higham's expansive but tender playing that pulls this music as far away from slapdash as it is possible to be. He apprehends



Glass act: Lavinia Meijer records in the presence of the composer

the complicated and multifarious elements of a set of pieces that seek to pay homage to Bach, the enormous and far-reaching Russian tradition from which their dedicatee came, and what Britten saw as a distillation of all his musical influences all at the same time. There is no doubting the plain virtuosity of these works, too, and despite his appreciation of their contextual importance, Higham still manages to revel in the glorious sound they invite the cello to make, playing around with its warmth of colours to bring out with glorious inevitability the Bach and Shostakovich hidden therein.

Caroline Gill

Glass

Glassworks - Opening Piece. Metamorphosis I-V. The Hours - The Poet Acts; Something She Has to Do; I'm Going to Make a Cake; An Unwelcome Friend; Choosing Life; The Hours

Lavinia Meijer *hp*

Channel Classics © CCSSA33912 (62' • DDD/DSD)



Dutch harpist Meijer collaborates with Glass

Recordings of Philip Glass's music for harp are certainly not new and it would be incorrect to view Lavinia Meijer's intentions

on this new release as simply a case of jumping on the bandwagon. Glass's essentially diatonic harmonies and rhythmic language of oscillating two-note patterns and repeating four-note figures lend themselves well to the harp, so it's no surprise that harpists are embracing his work. Maybe more surprising is that Glass has never in fact composed specifically for the instrument.

Arguably of more interest is the transformation that takes place when Glass's music is transferred to the harp: its softer, rounder qualities add expressive depth to the music. Meijer's recording works especially well in this respect. She does not push the music around too much, and the opening track from *Glassworks* almost announces itself with a whisper. Her playing in the *Metamorphosis* cycle is firmer and more restrained, but what is sometimes lost in intensity is made up in clarity and focus.

Meijer's own personal imprint is stronger in the set of pieces taken from Glass's soundtrack to Stephen Daldry's film *The Hours* (2002), where she made a number of arrangements based on Michael Riesman and Nico Muhly's own piano transcriptions. The harp's low, reverberant strings on 'The Poet Acts' works impressively well here, acting as an effective musical analogy to the murky

depths into which the character of Virginia Woolf descends at the beginning of the film.

Pwyl ap Siôn

Liszt

'Transcriptions'

Danse macabre (Saint-Saëns), S555. Zwölf Lieder von Franz Schubert, S561 - No 4, Die Post; No 7, Der Lindenbaum. Das Wandern (Die schöne Müllerin), S565 No 1. Zwölf Lieder von Franz Schubert, S558 - No 4, Erlkönig; No 9, Ständchen. Grandes études de Paganini, S141 - No 2; No 3; No 6. Isolde Liebestod, S447. Spinnerlied (Der fliegende Holländer), S440. O du, mein holder Abendstern (Tannhäuser), S380. Liebestraum, S541 No 3. Grand galop chromatique, S219

Niu Niu *pf*

EMI © 725332-2 (68' • DDD)



Liszt transcriptions from EMI's young Chinese hope

More than four years ago, the EMI marketing people sent me a disc to be released in China of the 11-year-old Niu Niu playing Mozart. What was my assessment of his playing and marketability in the UK? I revisited my reply after listening to this new disc by the now 15-year-old prodigy and found that the same concerns and astonishment remain. Marketed

under his nickname (his real name is Zhang Sheng Liang), will he be happy still to be known as Niu Niu when playing in his sixties? Is he being pushed too far too fast? It makes me ask such questions when the Wagner-Liszt *Isolde Liebestad* is on the programme. How much does a 15-year-old know of ecstasy and eroticism?

On the other hand, many young Asian virtuosos seem to respond to their hothouse training without apparent ill effect and, in purely digital terms, Niu Niu produces some remarkable playing. He has a wonderful *leggiere* touch when required: the 'Spinnerlied' from *The Flying Dutchman* is very fine (how good to hear a youngster revive this old favourite). I wish he had brought the same insouciance to the three *Paganini* Etudes which are, nevertheless, despatched with effortless aplomb, as is the concluding *Grand galop chromatique*. If he over-eggs the end of 'Erk König' (otherwise pungently dramatised), Niu Niu is able to breathe fresh life into an old chestnut like the *Liebestraum* No 3. So – fantastic fingers, bags of potential but, as yet, no charm. I just hope, in the words of the great Josef Hofmann, that the *Wunder* doesn't disappear at the same time as the *Kind*.

Jeremy Nicholas

Medtner

'Complete Piano Sonatas, Vol 1'
Piano Sonata, Op 5. Sonatina, Op *posth*.
Sonata-reminiscenza, Op 38 No 1

Paul Stewart *pf*

Grand Piano © GP617 (58' • DDD)



Canadian pianist starts Medtner sonata cycle

The first of a projected four-disc set of Medtner's piano sonatas performed by the Canadian pianist Paul Stewart launches a deeply personal and complex project with unflinching mastery and acute stylistic awareness. Played on a restored Steinway (on which Medtner himself performed) from the turn of the 20th century, all the music on this disc dates from the same period.

Opening with the G minor Sonatina (1898), a work already alive with Medtner's distinctive idiom, Stewart continues with music that won the unstinting praise of Rachmaninov and Josef Hofmann. Music that is at once rhapsodic and concentrated, it illustrates Medtner's dictum, 'Inspiration comes when thought is saturated in emotion and emotion is imbued with sense'. Such a balancing act is central to this tenaciously held creed and Stewart's performance is a marvel of musical commitment. Here tiny filaments and motifs are spun out in endless elaboration, yet everything is tightly directed and controlled. The *Sonata-reminiscenza*, too,

erases sniping comments such as 'a declaration of love in the language of the First Empire' with, as Stewart puts it, a mirror of Medtner's resignation to the fact that the Russia he cherished was lost forever.

Recordings of Medtner's music have remained scarce, making only fleeting appearances in the repertoires of Russian pianists as celebrated as Moiseiwitsch, Horowitz and Gilels, but a later generation has already achieved greater recognition. Hamish Milne, Hamelin, Tozer and most recently Sudbin have all increased awareness of a sadly neglected figure. And to this line, and to Medtner's own incomparable recordings, Paul Stewart adds a voice of exceptional distinction, finely presented and recorded. **Bryce Morrison**

Mendelssohn

'Piano con fuoco'

Fantasy, 'Sonate écossaise', Op 28. Piano Sonatas – Op 6; Op 105; Op 106. Sonata Movement. Andante and Rondo capriccioso, Op 14. Fantasia on 'The Last Rose of Summer', Op 15. Three Fancies (or Caprices), Op 16. Three Caprices, Op 33. Scherzo in B minor. Scherzo a capriccio. Capriccios – Op 5; Op 118

Roberto Prosseda *pf*

Decca © 2 476 5118DH2 (145' • DDD)



Mendelssohn from specialist and scholar Prosseda

This is a most appealing programme, with disc 1 devoted to the four sonatas (five if you include the *Sonate écossaise* – or 'écosaisse', as the track-listing has it – otherwise known as the Fantasy in F sharp minor, Op 28) and disc 2 to a succession of scherzos, capriccios and fantasias. This is Roberto Prosseda's fifth disc of Mendelssohn's piano works for Decca (I have not heard the others) and his evident love of the music comes across in his persuasive booklet.

I began with the first track on disc 2, the evergreen *Andante and Rondo* ('Rondò' in the booklet) *capriccioso*. My first reaction was to wince at the piano sound, the kind that makes you long for analogue in the old Kingsway Hall or shellac in the small Queen's Hall studio. You can almost smell the disinfectant, such is the merciless clarity of the acoustic produced by the laboratory that is the Tau Recording Studio, Acireate, Italy. A by-product of the engineering is the all-too-audible muffled thud of the sustaining pedal's action throughout both discs. Perhaps others will find this less of a distraction than I did.

As to the playing, this volume is well named, for Prosseda has a fiery and fluent technique. Charm, however, is not one of his strong suits, Op 14 being a case in point, while in those works of unrelenting note-spinning – and there

are quite a lot – Prosseda dispatches the pages of semiquavers with electrifying precision and flair but with little tenderness or tonal allure. Take the final section of the Fantasy, Op 28. This is played at a true *presto* with great power and sonority – there were moments when I thought I was listening to an Alkan étude – but there are few concessions to Mendelssohn's dynamics eloquently, if less thrillingly, executed by Benjamin Frith on his highly desirable Naxos cycle. When the composer requests *con fuoco*, you realise Prosseda has already been doing just that for the previous few pages. Nevertheless, despite these reservations, the two CDs offer a rare chance to hear these undervalued works side by side and piano lovers must be grateful for Prosseda's determined advocacy. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Mendelssohn

Songs Without Words – Op 19b; Op 30; Op 38; Op 53. Five Songs Without Words

Ronald Brautigam *pf*

BIS © 939 BIS1982 (69' • DDD/DSD)



Brautigam plays the Songs on a reconstructed fortepiano

Brautigam is, if not the foremost, certainly the most prolific of today's fortepiano specialists, with complete cycles of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven to his credit, all widely and justly praised for their outstanding musicianship, revelatory insights (Beethoven's 32 sonatas in particular) and recorded sound. Turning his attention to Mendelssohn, Brautigam uses an instrument built in 2010 by Paul McNulty after an 1830 Pleyel preserved at the Musée de la Musique in Paris. It offers a rare opportunity to hear some of the composer's most beloved works as he might have heard them: the first four of the six volumes of *Songs Without Words*, each containing six pieces, written between 1829 and 1841. Brautigam adds to these five individual *Lieder ohne Worte* without opus numbers.

There is, of course, much to savour and admire (not least the sound engineering by Ingo Petry), but I can't pretend that listening to 29 of these little tone-poems in sequence is the most rewarding way of hearing them. One is made aware, in a way that is not evident when the Songs are cherry-picked, that not all of them are equally inspired and how often Mendelssohn falls back on the same harmonic and figurative devices. The brisker ones work best but I miss the modern grand piano's sustained, singing tone in pieces such as the beautiful opening E major Song and No 3 from Op 30 in the same key. To my ears, Mendelssohn's genius was to compose music that would sound far more effective on an instrument that had yet to be built.

Jeremy Nicholas

Mompou

Cançons i Danses. Pessebres. Impresiones intimas.
Variations on a Theme of Chopin
Clélia Iruzun *pf*
Somm Céleste © SOMMCD0121 (72' • DDD)



Brazilian pianist Iruzun launches Mompou cycle

Laments 1-4, *triste, secreto* are Mompou's descriptions of several pieces from his *Impresiones intimas* (again, a resonant and revealing title), telling you what is at the heart of his unique and recondite idiom, a voice sustained over many years, ignoring an exterior world of rapid change. And it is this central quality that is so movingly and faithfully captured by Clélia Iruzun in the first of a projected series of discs of Mompou's music. Having recorded a wide range of material centring on South America, this Brazilian pianist now turns to music to which she is faultlessly attuned. Wherever you turn you will find an unflinching lucidity and affection. Nothing is forced or exaggerated. Never for a moment do you hear the smart metropolitan aplomb of an over-seasoned concert pianist. It is as if she is sharing a special love with a small circle of intimate friends.

How memorably she understands the way so much of the music retreats from its short-lived gaiety into confidentiality. Her way with Chopin's A major Prelude (the launch of the *Chopin* Variations) is sufficiently poised to make you long to hear her in the other 23 Preludes, and in Var 8 (the expressive core of the work) and in a later ghostly memory of Chopin's *Fantaisie-impromptu*, her poetic empathy is total. To crown it all, Iruzun's always apt and beautiful sonority is ideally captured by Somm. A memorable issue. **Bryce Morrison**

Mussorgsky · Prokofiev

Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition
Prokofiev Sarcasms, Op 17. Visions fugitives, Op 22
Steven Osborne *pf*
Hyperion © CDA67896 (66' • DDD)



Osborne delves deeper into Russian repertoire

After his disc of Rachmaninov's 24 Preludes (6/09), Steven Osborne moves into rougher Russian waters with Mussorgsky and Prokofiev. And here, once more, is an ideal blend of fidelity to the score, with a subtle and distinctive rather than overbearing musical personality. In the Mussorgsky everything is as musicianly as it is technically immaculate. What tonal delicacy and translucency in 'Tuleries', and listen to his finesse in the *tremolandos* at the end of 'Con mortuis in lingua mortua', something barely audible and coming as it were from a great distance. Yet in the more weighty

numbers ('Bydlo', 'The Great Gate at Kiev', etc), there is power without brutality so that what so easily degenerates into a mere uproar is so finely graded that you forget the essentially percussive nature of the writing.

In Prokofiev's *Sarcasms*, too, there is a leavening of the composer's violent and leering gesture against the Russian establishment but never at the expense of the title. Again, in the *Visions fugitives* there is the finest possible sense of 'things flying past' with a stunning reminder in the *Feroce* of No 14 of Osborne's superb technique. Returning to the Mussorgsky (the chief offering in this recital), this may well be the most lucid and musicianly *Pictures* on record. Hyperion's sound and presentation are beyond praise.

Bryce Morrison

Rachmaninov

Piano Sonata No 1, Op 28.
Variations on a Theme of Chopin, Op 22
Zlata Chochieva *pf*
Piano Classics © PCLO047 (62' • DDD)



Rachmaninov from Alberto Fano Competition winner

Rachmaninov's First Sonata and *Variations on a Theme of Chopin* provide a welcome change from the more familiar Second Sonata and the *Corelli* Variations. True, both works suffer from less than fully inspired writing. The Sonata's finale becomes unwieldy and discursive, while Vars 13-15 from the *Chopin* Variations hang fire. But there is vintage Rachmaninov in both works. Var 22 from the *Chopin* set, with its shifting polyrhythms and tonal palette, is among the composer's most heartfelt utterances; and the central *Lento* from the Sonata, with its lavishly embellished lines, could be by no other.

Which brings me to 28-year-old Zlata Chochieva, the possessor of a comprehensive technique who brings an inner glow to every bar. Her playing is indelibly Russian in its fullness and warmth, backed by a dauntless and easy command. What hallucinatory play of light and shade in Var 2, what lightness and brilliance in the skittering waltz patterns of Var 21. Choosing the wild virtuoso interlocked chording close to the set, she then goes on to play the First Sonata with a wonder of delicacy and power. Poetic and pianistic command could hardly go further and Chochieva does much to make amends for the memorable but long-deleted coupling of the same works by Boris Berezovsky. Piano Classics' sound is as natural as the playing though the booklet-notes' attribution to Mompou of Variations on Chopin's C minor Prelude is a slip of the mind: Mompou's Variations were based on Chopin's seventh Prelude in A.

Bryce Morrison

GRAMOPHONE Archive

Pictures at an Exhibition

Gramophone's view of Mussorgsky's gallery in three recordings of the original piano version



JUNE 1947

Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition
Benno Moiseiwitsch *pf*

HMV © C3576-9 (12in • 19s 6d)

We have become so familiar with these pieces in their orchestral form that it is not easy to hear them without recalling the orchestral colours. Some of the numbers, naturally, do not sound as effective as they come out orchestrated. But it seems ungrateful to make reservations in face of Moiseiwitsch's brilliant playing of this very difficult work. He has, I believe, a particular affection for it and gives a carefully thought-out performance that, one feels, could hardly be better. *Alec Robertson*



DECEMBER 1967

Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition
Vladimir Ashkenazy *pf*

(incl orchestral version: Los Angeles PO / Mehta)

Decca © SXL6328 (12in • 32s 3d)

I much prefer the promenades from picture to picture on the piano where they can be more flexibly played and made more intimate than they usually sound from the orchestra. I thought 'Il vecchio castello' gained in poetry on the piano, even though Mehta also catches the mood extremely well. The 'Tuleries' I preferred with its orchestral colour but 'Bydlo' ceases to be the slow-moving bore it usually is, especially when played at the quite fast tempo Ashkenazy chooses. Mehta also takes it quite lightly, which makes me wonder if the two artists had got together beforehand. If so, I think it perfectly right, for the object of this record is obviously to show us similar performances of the same work in its two versions. *Trevor Harvey*



JUNE 1997

Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition
Ivor Pogorelich *pf*

DG © 437 667-2GH (62' • DDD)

Ivor Pogorelich's performance is hardly tailor-made for 'easy listening' or for musical philistines. Magnificently unsettling, he offers a re-creation of the most concentrated force and drama, articulated with a crystalline mastery. Pogorelich's cleansing and revitalising is at once evident in the opening 'Promenade', where each single crotchet and quaver is accented precisely as marked before Mussorgsky's more subdued chordal extension. 'The Gnome' is truly *vivo* and *meno vivo* with the sharpest differentiation between *fortissimo* and *piano*, and how cunningly Pogorelich differentiates the semiquavers and *tremolandos* at the heart of Baba Yaga's frenzied flight. A magisterial view of 'The Great Gate of Kiev' concludes a performance of rare poetic verisimilitude. *Bryce Morrison*

Read articles in full at the Gramophone Archive:
gramophone.co.uk

Raff

'Piano Works, Vol 3'

Album lyrique, Op 17. Cinq Eclogues, Op 105.
Impromptu-valse, Op 94. Fantaisie-polonaise,
Op 106

Tra Nguyen *pf*

Grand Piano © GP634 (77' • DDD)



Third disc in Nguyen's Grand Piano Raff exploration

Joachim Raff's journey from humble beginnings to a sky-high reputation was followed by decline and fall. Today, most of his works languish in oblivion, which makes Tra Nguyen's persuasive series of recordings, of which this is Vol 3, a double asset. Yet Raff's neglect is understandable; and listening to this recital, however admirably presented, you are struck by the way so much of the music glides into a gently soporific idiom, too restricted and respectable to hold your attention. True, Raff's generally placid nature can erupt into something more dramatic (the Ballade from the *Album lyrique*) but for much of the time he is so enveloped in his homely charm that piece after piece, whether Reverie, Romance or Nocturne, become undifferentiated.

This makes those moments when, as Mark Thomas tells us in his booklet-note, Raff 'ratchets up the speed' especially welcome. The Scherzo and the grandiose Introduction and Fugue of the *Album lyrique* or the concluding Fantaisie-polonaise (marked *energico*) come like a breath of fresh air. The *Impromptu-valse*, too, gives us a graceful salon style spun off with delightful ease by Nguyen, whose playing throughout, admirably recorded, is as warm, fluent and sympathetic as you could wish.

Bryce Morrison

Saint-Saëns

'Complete Organ Works'

Ben van Oosten *org*

Dabringhaus und Grimm ® ③ MDG316 1767-2

(165' • DDD)

Played on the Cavaillé-Coll organ of

La Madeleine, Paris



The organ works on Saint- Saëns's former instrument

Saint-Saëns, hailed by Liszt as the greatest organist of his day, wrote comparatively little music for the organ in terms of his total output and relatively little of it features in organ programmes today (though, ironically, the organ is the cynosure of one of his most popular works, the Third Symphony). Ironical too that, as in his works for solo piano, one has to cherry-pick to find Saint-Saëns at his most inspired and original. Compare, for instance, the arresting early (1857) Fantaisie in E flat, by far the most widely played of his solo organ

works, with the lacklustre D flat major Fantaisie and the curate's egg that is the C major Fantaisie with its magical ending.

Saint-Saëns was organist of La Madeleine, Paris, for 20 years (1857-77) and one of the chief attractions of Ben van Oosten's survey of the (almost) complete organ works is that they are performed on the magnificent Cavaillé-Coll in La Madeleine that the composer knew so well. It comes hard on the heels of Andrew-John Smith's three separate discs for Hyperion played on the very same instrument. In terms of recorded sound, there is little to choose between the two. Both are of demonstration quality and wall-shaking sonority, with full and imaginative use made of the vast resources of symphonic colours on offer (Saint-Saëns left directions for registration and timbre only for the early works). Van Oosten adopts brisker tempi throughout: for instance, the gloomy first section of *Cypres et lauriers*, a work composed to mark the 1919 armistice, lasts 7'48"; Smith's *Cypres* clocks in at 9'13". (Neither the Hyperion or MDG discs features *Lauriers*, the imposing second section, which is scored for organ and orchestra.)

Smith includes several forgettable minor works not played by van Oosten as well as the *Fantaisie pour orgue-Aeolian*, deemed by the composer to be unplayable by hands and feet, lasting over 23 minutes and with a second part for tubular bells. It is not one of Saint-Saëns's greatest works. Van Oosten's comes in a three-disc case with all the major pieces and, unlike Smith but greatly to the music's advantage, plays the two sets of Preludes and Fugues as a sequence. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Cpte Org Wks – selected comparison:

Smith (10/08, 10/11, 9/12) (HYPE)

CDA67713, CDA67815, CDA67922

Schumann • Brahms

Brahms Theme and Variations (from String Sextet
No 1) **Schumann** Fantasiestücke, Op 12.

Kreisleriana, Op 16

Imogen Cooper *pf*

Chandos © CHAN10755 (76' • DDD)



Cooper's 'complete' solo Schumann cycle begins

Many years ago I noted an element of caution in Imogen Cooper's playing. Her way with Debussy's 'Poissons d'or' in particular made it seem as if those incomparable golden fishes were eyeing possible fishermen. Today we can reflect on the way this pianist's artistry has blossomed and evolved into a greater sense of imaginative freedom, finding a truer balance of sense and sensibility. Here, in Schumann's *Fantasiestücke*, Op 12, she relishes the haunting ebb and flow of 'Des Abends' and finds her way to the very heart of the composer in the delectably pointed romantic polyphony in the

central section of 'In der Nacht'. You may miss the more magical fleetness of Perahia or Argerich (her studio rather than helter-skelter live performance) in 'Traumes Wirren' but even here her steadiness provides an always musically alternative to speed or hysteria.

Again, in *Kreisleriana* you will hardly locate the transcendental pianistic sheen cast over its pages by Géza Anda or the volatility of Horowitz (most notably in the gnomic final pages) but you remain grateful for the way Cooper tempers Schumann's hallucinatory art with her own more basic and fundamental musicianship. Sandwiched in between these two masterpieces, she reminds you of Brahms's veneration for the Schumanns, giving us the D minor Theme and Variations from the First String Sextet with all their richness and fullness made glowingly intact. Cooper is finely recorded and Nicholas Marston's detailed notes are an added bonus.

Bryce Morrison

'The Irish Piano'

Barber Excursions, Op 20 No 3. Nocturne, Op 33

Bax Country Tune. Nocturne **Dennehy** North

Circular **Field** Nocturnes - No 4; No 10 **Grainger**

Molly on the Shore **P Hammond** The Beardless Boy.

John O'Reilly the Active **Sholdice** Am Koppenplatz

WV Wallace Mazurka-étude. Roslyn Castle **Whelan**

The Currach **I Wilson** Sonnenwende **Traditional**

Cailín ó cois tSuire Mé. The Coulin. My Lagan Love.

She moved through the fair (all arr McHale)

Michael McHale *pf*

RTÉ Lyric FM © CD139 (73' • DDD)



Belfast pianist explores Ireland's piano heritage

For his first solo piano CD, Michael McHale has programmed 19 short works featuring classical and contemporary Irish composers, works influenced by Irish music, plus McHale's own arrangements of traditional Irish tunes. The stark and spacious mood of the latter works contrasts with motoric, harmonically sophisticated selections such as Philip Hammond's *The Beardless Boy* or Ian Wilson's *Sonnenwende*. Bax's *Country Tune* and Grainger's *Molly on the Shore* work quite well back to back, as do Field's Nocturne No 10 and Barber's Field-inspired Nocturne, Op 33. The repeated notes in William V Wallace's *Mazurka-étude* lean more to Spain than Poland, while the magical textures Donnacha Dennehy achieves in *North Circular*'s exquisite high-register writing transcend national characteristics. More importantly, all of the music comes to life through the singing sensibility of McHale's sensitive and polished pianism, captured in a warmly ambient recording. In short, it's easy to recommend such a highly distinct and imaginatively presented release. **Jed Distler**

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

MURRAY PERAHIA

Jed Distler assesses the recorded legacy – so far – of one of today's finest pianists and the winner of the 2012 Gramophone Piano Award



Immaculate technique: Murray Perahia's complete recordings for Sony reissued in one lavish box

The year 2012 marked both Murray Perahia's 65th birthday and his 40th anniversary as a recording artist for Sony Classical and its predecessor labels. To celebrate these milestones, Sony/BMG releases 'Murray Perahia: The First 40 Years', a lavish 67-CD/five-DVD box-set encompassing the pianist's complete audio and video Sony/Columbia/CBS releases, two BBC programmes appearing for the first time on home video and a live 1967 Library of Congress chamber music programme first published by Vox on LP. The volumes are presented in facsimiles of the original LP jackets and CD sleeves, and ordered according to chronological release date. This allows listeners to follow the trajectory of Perahia's artistic evolution and repertoire interests. From the start, the German/Austrian canon and Chopin have occupied Perahia's studio output, albeit with a few diversions. He briefly flirted with Romantic virtuoso fare by Liszt and Rachmaninov in the late 1980s after becoming close to Vladimir Horowitz. In addition, Perahia's superb solo Bartók solo recital, Berg Sonata and Tippett First Sonata make one regret that this pianist has not committed more 20th-century music to disc.

Perahia's consummate musicianship and mindful virtuosity were evident from the start and have remained remarkably

consistent over the past four decades. This may account for the fact that most of his recordings have stayed in print since their first release. However, the collection's new transfers from the analogue and early digital sources often reveal a more judicious, less harsh equalisation in comparison to their first CD versions, although little can be done to rectify the original dryness and dynamic constriction characterising the 1973 Chopin Second and Third Sonatas and the 1975 Chopin Preludes. The latter appears on CD for the first time, by the way, as do the refined and transparent Beethoven Op 7 and Op 22 sonata performances, plus Perahia's 1979 Schumann recital accompanying Peter Pears, late in his career but still intensely expressive.

It is difficult to pinpoint highlights in such a highly distinctive body of work. Surely the Mozart concerto cycle with Perahia leading the English Chamber Orchestra from the keyboard represents a discographical cornerstone in regard to the pianist's immaculate technique, stylistic surety and classical symmetry. His similarly taut and poised Beethoven concertos with Bernard Haitink and the Concertgebouw Orchestra evoke similarly Apollonian readings by Solomon, Casadesu and Gieseking but with grittier accentuation and stronger harmonic underpinnings. Schumann's

volatile sound world finds Perahia managing to address the music's ardent dynamism while still clarifying knotty linear strands (the C major Fantasy's obsessive central movement, the Second Sonata's relentless outer movements or the cross-rhythms in the Concerto's finale, for example). Similar observations apply to Mendelssohn's *Variations sérieuses*, Brahms's Third Sonata and Franck's *Prélude, choral et fugue*. Strange things happen in the Bartók Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion with Georg Solti; pianos 1 and 2 keep switching positions in the first two movements and the xylophone consistently plays an octave lower than notated. No qualms, though, about the rarefied repartee between Perahia and Radu Lupu in Mozart's Sonata for Two Pianos and the Schubert F minor Fantasy.

One wonders if the thumb injury and imposed time off from concert-giving in the 1990s subliminally instigated a broadening of Perahia's style, with its wider dynamic scope and sense of risk. His remake of Schubert's Sonata in A major, D959, for instance, makes less of local details than the earlier 1987 traversal yet abounds with a wider variety of articulations and dynamic shadings, along with a more rhythmically incisive *Scherzo*. Likewise the pianist's Chopin often hits harder (what bracing Mazurkas!). Conversely, Perahia permits himself more *rubato* leeway throughout the Brahms Op 79 No 1 Rhapsody's softer sections in 2010 than he did nearly 20 years earlier, although the Op 119 No 4 Rhapsody remake proves heavier, sterner and less supple compared to the brighter, more effectively contrasted earlier attempt. Yet it is possible that Perahia's immersion in Bach has yielded some of his most rewarding recordings, including a richly varied and assiduously structured *Goldberg Variations*, a intelligently terraced *Italian Concerto*, plus the wonderful *English Suites* and Partitas, where the niceties of Baroque dance forms and the modern concert grand's expressive potential dazzlingly merge.

A sturdy, well-filled book includes each album's complete original English language annotations (a website address is given for the French and German translations), a selection of photos, complete track and session data, plus discographies by chronology and composer. Sony/BMG has spared no effort to present Perahia's comprehensive recorded legacy in the right way, doing both label and artist proud. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Various Cpsrs 'The First 40 Years'
Murray Perahia
Sony **CD** (67 CDs + 5 **DVD**) 88691 91256-2

Vocal



Richard Wigmore on Matthias Goerne's continuing Schubert cycle:
'For rapt inwardness and scrupulous care for tone production and a seamless legato line, Goerne has no equal today' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**



David Patrick Stearns reviews Nicky Spence's Shakespeare songs:
'Rich and quite strange is the only possible summation of this dazzling, bewildering collection of songs' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 73**

JS Bach

'Cantatas for the Complete Liturgical Year, Vol 15'
Cantatas – No 52, Falsche Welt, dir traue ich nicht!; No 60, O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort; No 116, Du Friedefürst, Herr Jesu Christ; No 140, Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme
Yeree Suh *sop* **Petra Noskaiová** *contr*
Christoph Genz *ten* **Jan Van der Crabben** *bass*
La Petite Bande / Sigiswald Kuijken
Accent ④ ACC25315 (72' • DDD)

JS Bach

'Cantatas, Vol 52'
Cantatas – No 29, Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir; No 112, Der Herr ist mein getreuer Hirt; No 140, Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme
Hana Blažíková *sop* **Robin Blaze** *counterten*
Gerd Türk *ten* **Peter Kooij** *bass*
Bach Collegium Japan / Masaaki Suzuki
BIS ④ BIS1981 (64' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Kuijken's cantata cycle continues while Suzuki's nears its close. Those following Sigiswald Kuijken's journey will recall its premise of a single cantata for each Sunday and High Day – a discriminating process in itself and one which has tended towards works of a particularly intimate and rhetorical gait. Here again Kuijken and La Petite Bande bring their most natural and distilled spaciousness to proceedings. If the opening movement of *Wachet auf* is a touch prosaic, even emaciated at times, the subsequent duet between the Soul and Christ is a heart-warming essay in gentle domestic rumination. The dialogue between instruments and solo voices is indeed where these performances come alive; how delectable is 'Ich halt es mit dem lieben Gott' from BWV52, the three oboe 'graces' and soprano Yeree Suh beautifully reflecting Bach's spiritual concord of a world united by the Trinity. *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort*, BWV60, like its later partner work on the same opening text, BWV20, encouraged Bach to acknowledge 'eternity' with deliberately unfamiliar idioms and theatrical *figurae*. Brought up on Hertha Töpper's quasi-Wagnerian notion of 'fear' for Karl Richter,



Sigiswald Kuijken's Bach cantata cycle reaches Volume 15

Kuijken's bald declamations certainly ring the changes. More naturally embedded in the collective ensemble is BWV116, demonstrating Petra Noskaiová's beguiling alto.

If this is not quite a vintage Kuijken cantata release, Suzuki's almost-last hurrah in BCJ's cantata marathon also falls a little short of some recent triumphs. Karl Ristenpart's vintage *Wachet auf* from 1962 brings a level of irresistible expectation which has rarely been equalled (how cheering that pre-'authentic' Bach still offers a valuable authenticity). If Suzuki is comparatively world-weary here, and also in BWV29, where the brass tuning leaves something to be desired, the cantata for Misericordia Sunday (second after Easter with its image of Jesus the Good Shepherd), BWV112, is universally outstanding. Suzuki draws attention to the strongly directed bass-lines of the chorus, the bucolic effervescence of 'Zum reinen Wasser' – delectably delivered by Robin Blaze – and the carefree, generous coloratura of the wonderfully etched duet ('You prepare a table before me'). If framed by relative disappointments, this is a finely characterised reading, celebrating the older Bach in a happy place. **Jonathan Freeman-Attwood**

Beethoven

Missa solemnis, Op 123

Marlis Petersen *sop* **Gerhild Romberger** *mez*

Benjamin Hulett *ten* **David Wilson-Johnson** *bass*

Collegium Vocale Gent; Champs-Élysées Orchestra / Philippe Herreweghe

PHI ④ LPH007 (75' • DDD)



Back to Beethoven for Herreweghe's own label

Following their Bach B minor Mass (8/12), Philippe Herreweghe and his team have produced an equally fine account of Beethoven's choral masterpiece. The orchestra is a period band but the sceptical and unkeen can rest assured that this is an expressive and weighty performance, to be ranked with any on modern instruments.

Indeed, the *Kyrie* is weightier than many. Herreweghe adopts a daringly slow tempo: the first section takes four and a half minutes, whereas Steinberg (ICA Classics, 8/12) skips through it in three and even Klemperer (Testament) comes in at 3'32". But the movement never drags, Herreweghe shaping the long phrases admirably. Elsewhere, his tempi are on the brisk side: the *Benedictus* flows

nicely, with a hint of *portamento* in Alessandro Moccia's sweet-toned violin solo. The orchestra is a constant delight: the woodwind at 'Gratias agimus' and 'Qui tollis' play with a chamber-music delicacy and the twittering flute at 'Et incarnatus' is perfectly balanced.

The adoption of a pitch at nearly a semitone below today's standard helps danger spots like the tenors' entry at 'Quoniam tu solus sanctus' to sound vigorous but unstrained. The choir is excellent, with an impressive precision in the *Credo*'s 'et ascendit in coelum' and 'Amen', leading to a mighty climax where Beethoven slams on the brakes. This precision is matched by the soloists, especially by Marlis Petersen, with her clear articulation of the runs on 'patria' towards the end of the *Gloria*. David Wilson-Johnson paints the opening of the *Agnus Dei* in dark colours that complement the sombre scoring. Clear, warm recorded sound.

Richard Lawrence

Britten

Les illuminations, Op 18^a. Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge, Op 10. Serenade, Op 31^b

^aBarbara Hannigan sop ^bJames Gilchrist ten

^bJasper de Waal hn Amsterdam Sinfonietta /

Candida Thompson vn

Channel Classics ©  CCSSA32213 (79' • DDD/DSD)



Thompson's experimental orchestra takes on Britten

The Amsterdam Sinfonietta, directed from the first violin by Scot Candida Thompson, start strongly with a *Les illuminations* in which both Britten and Rimbaud get their due. Canadian soprano Barbara Hannigan brings to the texts the dramatic energy she has to burn in her championship of Ligeti and Boulez, while the conductorless orchestra and soloist (herself sometimes a conductor) sound a natural fit.

The *Frank Bridge* Variations were not only premiered on Radio Hilversum but even have (from the Netherlands CO with Gordan Nikolitch) a Dutch rival in the catalogue. Thompson's ensemble plays them with as much attention to the brooding colours surrounding the initial appearance of the theme itself as to the wit of the fifth movement's Italian aria. The *Serenade* is given with its rejected extra movement, 'Now sleeps the crimson petal'. 'Elegy' and 'Dirge' generate tension and there's a real sense of duet between horn and tenor. Elsewhere both soloists play their parts quite straight, Gilchrist not probing around in the verse as much as do Pears (with Britten himself) or Bostridge (with Rattle), and de Waal rather remote from the text-engaged prompting that the BPO's Radek Baborák seems to have had from Rattle and Bostridge.

An enjoyable and carefully balanced CD, certainly, but the competition – the Britten originals, the Bostridge disc (*Les illuminations* as

well as the *Serenade*) and a well-sung (Toby Spence) disc from Clio Gould and her Scottish Ensemble with the same programme as here – is far from negligible. **Mike Ashman**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Spence, Scottish Ens, Gould (5/05) (LINN) CKD226

Frank Bridge Vars – selected comparison:

Netherlands CO, Nikolitch (PENT) PTC5186 056

Serenade – selected comparison:

Pears, Boyd Neel Orch, Britten (12/45^b) (DECC) 468 801-2FD

Illuminations, Serenade – selected comparisons:

Pears, LSO, Britten (9/64^a, 9/93) (LOND) 436 395-2LM

Bostridge, BPO, Rattle (12/05) (EMI) 558049-2

Handel

Acis and Galatea (arr Mendelssohn)

Jeni Bern sop Benjamin Hulett, Nathan Vale tens

Brindley Sherratt bass Christ Church Cathedral Choir,

Oxford; Oxford Philomusica / Stephen Darlington

Nimbus Alliance © NIG201 (76' • DDD • T)



Mendelssohn's revival of Handel's pastoral serenata

This delightful disc might have been billed as 'Mendelssohn the Reviver', since under the influence of Friedrich Zelter, his composition teacher and conductor of the Berlin Singakademie, not only Bach but also Handel gained from Mendelssohn's ministrations on behalf of neglected Baroque masters in the late 1820s. Once a choral singer's favourite, *Acis and Galatea* probably receives fewer performances these days, which is regrettable since it has more than its fair share of sublime Handelian melodic riches. Mendelssohn's score, rediscovered in 2005 and now in the Bodleian Library, is essentially a filling-out of Handel's original chamber-sized texture which Mozart had previously reworked in 1788 at van Swieten's behest. The only previous recording (sung in German and conducted by Nicholas McGegan – Carus, 1/09) dates from 2008. The Oxford singers perform in English.

Mendelssohn's treatment is sympathetic to the original. He heightens the dramatic thrust by chopping down several *da capo* arias and omitting the air 'As when the dove'. High points of his orchestral 'colouring-in' include the clarinets in 'Consider, fond shepherd' and the energetic punches of Tristan Fry's timpani. The Oxford Philomusica are on sparkling form. Just five of the work's 28 movements employ the chorus. Their contribution is solid and secure. The soloists' contributions are more variable, with a few untidy moments of ensemble between both tenors and orchestra. However, in 'O ruddier than the cherry', Brindley Sherratt (Polyphemos) is on stupendous form and Nathan Vale (Damon) covers his running passages with ease, despite a strong vibrato; Benjamin Dale is an agile Acis and Jeni Bern brings a caressingly light touch as the sea-nymph Galatea. **Malcolm Riley**

G Jackson

The Voice of the Bard. Now I have known, O Lord.

O Doctor optime. Missa Triueriensis. Thomas, Jewel of Canterbury. Sanctum est verum lumen. Angeli, archangeli. A ship with unfurled sails. Aeterna caeli gloria. Ave regina caelorum^a

State Choir Latvia / Māris Sirmails with

^aKaspars Zemītis elec gtr

Hyperion © CDA67976 (78' • DDD • T/t)



Sacred and secular Jackson from the State Choir Latvia

Unquestionably the State Choir Latvia is a magnificent body of singers. They encompass a vast dynamic range and deliver words and music with impeccable precision and clarity. All this is superbly demonstrated in a vivid account of *The Voice of the Bard*. Marshalled by Māris Sirmails, they thrill with their rhythmically compelling opening unisons, entice with their delicate chording at 'Whose ears have heard' and soothe with their lilting harmonic underlay for 'Calling the lapsed soul'.

They are even more vividly in their element with the disc's atmospheric title-song, *A ship with unfurled sails*; as well they might, since this was inspired by the vocal and literary traditions of the Baltic lands. At least, that seems to be what Andrew Stewart's dense booklet-notes tell us, although it is not always easy to distil pure information from his torrents of hyperbole. He writes, for example, of 'creative ideas being forced to conform to the limits of a narrow Procrustean bed', which is another way of saying that juxtaposing Kaspars Zemītis's electric guitar and the choir is imaginative. Which it is, even if *Ave regina caelorum* occasionally sounds as if solo riffs from a nearby rock session have accidentally found their way on to the finished master. That said, there are places where Jackson's imagination has yielded breathtaking results: an outburst of energy at 6'05", or the lovely linking of the guitar with Inese Romancāne's sweet soprano and a whispering choral accompaniment at 9'38".

Most of this music was, however, conceived for rather smaller and more discreet vocal forces, and often there is a sense of its being overwhelmed by the sheer weight of the choral sound. An impressive choir performing truly impressive music, certainly, but it seems more a marriage of convenience than a match made in heaven. **Marc Rochester**

Liszt • Mahler

Liszt Lieder aus Schillers Wilhelm Tell, S292. Oh! quand je dors, S282. Die Loreley, S273 Mahler Urlicht. Rheinlegendchen. Verlor'ne Mühl. Wo die schönen Trompeten blasen. Um schlimme Kinder artig zu machen. Ich ging mit Lust. Nicht wiedersehen. Ablösung im Sommer. Das himmlische Leben
Anne Schwanewilms sop Charles Spencer pf
Onyx © ONYX4103 (64' • DDD • T/t)



Scrumptious Lieder from soprano Schwanewilms

In her previous recording (Orfeo), Anne Schwanewilms found a surprising breadth of expression between Richard Strauss's operatic heroines and his *Four Last Songs*. Here, pivoting between Liszt and Mahler, she finds contrasts on a wider scale entirely. The differences are indicative not merely of their respective eras but also of the composers themselves. Of the age-old question of which comes first, the words or the music, Mahler and Liszt were clearly in different camps. Mahler would never dream of letting a text get in the way of a melody, while Liszt fell more clearly in line with the prosody tradition of his contemporary Schumann. At no point would any sensitive listener confuse songs from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* with the handful of rare Liszt performances in this programme – and yet Schwanewilms navigates those differences to the benefit of both.

Evidence of her artistry is everywhere apparent. Her phrasing is seamless, with none of the audible words-versus-music negotiations noticeable even in fine singers. Her vocal quality is not merely pure but powerful, though in her case that power stays mostly in reserve until summoned by the music. Rather than pummelling the listener with her presence, Schwanewilms coaxes the listener into her realm with the subtlety of a whisper. Describing her vocal quality is strangely akin to food: 'luscious' comes to mind, as do 'rich' and 'creamy'. Really, I find it impossible to listen to this recording without getting hungry. **Ken Smith**

R Panufnik

Love Endureth^a. Love Abide^b. Magnificat & Nunc dimittis^c. Zen Love Song^d. Schola Missa de Angelis^e. Mass of the Angels^f

^aGilles Sinclair *treb* ^bHeather Shipp *mez* ^cBen

Fleetwood Smyth *ten* ^bMark Stone *bar* ^fTom Little,

^cRichard Ogden *org* ^dKiku Day *jiinashi-shakuhachi*

^{bef}London Oratory School Schola; ^bColla Voce Singers;

^cExultate Singers / David Ogden; ^{ad}Voces8 / Barnaby

Smith; ^{bef}London Mozart Players / ^fLee Ward

Warner Classics © 2564 65720-6 (65' • DDD • T/t)



Cross-cultural choral works from Panufnik junior

Admirer as I am of Roxanna Panufnik's work, I am suspicious of creations intended to 'build bridges between different faiths'. This disc contains music for the Mass, Hebrew psalm settings and mixtures of Sufi and Christian texts but I am glad to say that Panufnik's musical integrity is not compromised. Though she is happy to refer to different traditions (Sephardic music, Turkish modes, for example), they are integrated into her own musical language. The

pieces are sung by a variety of ensembles, all of them with quite distinct characteristics. The bright, chamber quality of Voces8 in *Love Endureth*, the first track, is perfect for bringing out the work's piquant harmonies and dancing rhythms.

The first part of *Love Abide*, a setting of Rumi, is also very striking but I find it difficult to relate to the very different second section, a setting of I Corinthians 13:1-13 that strongly suggests recent John Adams. I much prefer the glowing sound world of the *Magnificat* (with interpolated *Ave Maria*) and *Nunc dimittis*, beautifully performed by the Exultate Singers with organist Richard Johnson.

Following a haunting *Zen Love Song* (Voces8 once more, again on tremendous form, this time with shakuhachi), we have two different versions of Panufnik's vision of the well-loved *Missa de Angelis*, one congregational and the other more elaborate. Both of them work beautifully and flow naturally; I wonder if that is a result of the composer working completely in her own tradition. **Ivan Moody**

Parry • Stanford

Parry I was glad (1911 version). Coronation Te Deum. Blest Pair of Sirens. Jerusalem (orch Elgar) Stanford Magnificat & Nunc dimittis – in A; in B flat; in C; in G^a

^aCarolyn Sampson *sop* ^aDavid Wilson-Johnson *bass*

^aCatrin Finch *hp* Choir of the King's Consort;

King's Consort / Robert King

Vivat © VIVAT101 (68' • DDD • T)



Robert King returns with new label and new repertoire

Following closely on the outstanding Chandos disc of choral music by Parry with royal connections comes this disc of Parry's best-known choral works interleaved with Anglican church music by Parry's contemporary, Stanford. It also marks the welcome return to the recording studio of Robert King and his period-instrument Consort and Choir.

The only two Parry works on both discs are the *Coronation Te Deum* of 1911, written for the coronation of King George V, and *Jerusalem*, this time in Elgar's brilliant orchestration. Predictably, the King's Consort versions are more intimate than those on the Chandos disc, with the *Te Deum* less atmospheric but presented in sharper focus, not so much concerned with evoking a coronation service.

Jerusalem, which comes at the end of the sequence, is then given with the first stanza sung by the women of the chorus alone and the full chorus taking over for the second, 'Bring me my bow'; Parry originally asked for a solo soprano for the first stanza, as on the Chandos disc. *I was glad*, which provides the title for the disc, is also given a performance in the atmosphere of a church rather than of a cathedral but is no less dramatic in its vivid

trumpet calls. *Blest Pair of Sirens*, Parry's other well-known motet, comes with biting attack.

The four Stanford works are all settings of the Anglican Evening Service. The contrasts are fascinating, with the A major setting of 1880 and the C major with organ accompaniment both relatively simple, compared with the grandly ceremonial settings in G major (with the pure-toned soprano Carolyn Sampson and the bass David Wilson-Johnson as soloists) and B flat, the grandest of all. Clear, well-focused sound, recorded in St Jude's Church, London NW11. **Edward Greenfield**

Petrassi

Magnificat^a. Salmo IX^a

^aSabina Cvilak *sop* Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Regio, Turin / Gianandrea Nosedà Chandos © CHANI0750 (66' • DDD • T/t)



Early works from Italian follower of Stravinsky

Goffredo Petrassi's range as a composer was far wider than his eight Concertos for Orchestra (8/05) might suggest, encompassing opera, ballet, solo concertos, chamber and instrumental pieces. His substantial body of vocal and choral music contains some of his finest inspirations, not least the classic *Coro di morte* (at one time available from Adès).

Psalm IX (1934-36) and the *Magnificat* (1939-40) are relatively early, still betraying Stravinsky's influence, but between them one can hear Petrassi's own voice emerging. In *Psalm IX* – scored for chorus, string orchestra, brass, percussion and two pianos, and begun just after the First Orchestral Concerto – the impact of the then still very new *Oedipus Rex* and *Symphony of Psalms* is palpable, particularly in the hieratic choral writing. Not quite, perhaps, the sum of its parts, it packs quite a punch nevertheless. The *Magnificat* is altogether slicker and freer stylistically, its opening orchestral episode having a spring in its step redolent of top-quality Martinů with more characteristic choral writing.

The performances by the forces of Teatro Regio, Turin, are committed and persuasive, though both works sound like they need a little more 'living with'. Soprano Sabina Cvilak is taxed at times by Petrassi's tough, high vocal lines but otherwise hers is a gutsy account. Excellent sound makes this a thoroughly recommendable release and I hope Chandos and Nosedà go on to give us more choral Petrassi, such as *Coro di morte* and the late *Orationes Christi*. **Guy Rickards**

Schubert

Im Abendrot, D799. Der Wanderer, D493.

Nachtviolen, D752. Im Walde, D834. Normanns Gesang, D846. Der Geistertanz, D116. Schatzgräbers Begehr, D761. An den Mond, D259. Erlkönig, D328.



Royal connections: Robert King and his Consort and Choir record Parry and Stanford

Am See, D746. Alinde, D904. Widerschein, D949. Die Forelle, D550. Der Fluss, D693. Abendröte, D690. Klage, D415. Der Strom, D565. Fischerweise, D881. Auf der Bruck, D853

Matthias Goerne *bar* **Andreas Haefliger** *pf*

Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2141 (68' • DDD • T/t)



Goerne's Schubert song exploration continues

More than any other singer, Matthias Goerne conjures a Schubert who once allegedly said of himself, 'Sometimes it seems as if I no longer belong to this world': a counterpart to the solitary, absorbed figures in the landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich, whose *Monk by the Sea* is duly reproduced in Harmonia Mundi's booklet. Seekers of charm and lightness should look elsewhere. But for rapt inwardness and scrupulous care for tone production and a seamless *legato* line, Goerne has no equal today.

His darkly mellow baritone, soft-grained yet with reserves of power, is a perfect instrument for the pantheistic reveries and barcarolles on this new disc. In two sublime sunset scenes, 'Im Abendrot' and 'Abendröte', he seems to hug Schubert's incantatory lines to himself. The luxuriant, Italianate cantilenas of 'Der Fluss' and 'Widerschein' are gently, gracefully caressed, the long phrases floated on seemingly inexhaustible reserves of breath, and Goerne's brooding intensity, breadth of phrasing and deep bass resonances make for a magnificent 'Der Wanderer', that quintessential expression of Romantic alienation. Goerne's tone doesn't

easily smile, of course. Despite every encouragement from Andreas Haefliger, 'Fischerweise' sounds more severe than blithe. The enchanting barcarolle 'Alinde' is all musing inwardness, à la Friedrich, where a touch of playfulness would not come amiss. But after so many performances from winsome sopranos, I rather welcomed Goerne's unusually urgent, incisive 'Die Forelle', with its vivid flash of anger at the fisherman's treachery. As in all the faster songs, Goerne is careful to preserve evenness of line even *in extremis*. With the superbly articulate Haefliger, he conjures a terrifying night-ride in 'Erlkönig', characterising each 'voice' vividly without recourse to exaggerated ventriloquism. Its equestrian counterpart is 'Auf der Bruck', another grippingly sung and played performance that mingles breathless impetuosity with stabs of intense yearning: a thrilling, no-holds-barred send-off to a recital that is self-recommending for the baritone's many admirers. And even doubters might have to concede that no singer cares more than Goerne for the beauty and eloquence of Schubert's melodies. **Richard Wigmore**

'As You Like It'

Argento Six Elizabethan Songs - Winter; Dirge
Britten Fancie **G Bush** It was a lover and his lass
Chausson Trois Chansons de Shakespeare, Op 28
Dankworth Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? The Compleat Works. Dunsinane Blues
Dickinson Schubert in Blue - Hark, hark, the lark
Haydn She never told her love, HobXXVIa/34

Harder Under the greenwood tree **Poulenc** Fancy
Purcell An Epithalamium. If music be the food of love (both arr Tippett/Bergmann) **Quilter** Three Shakespeare Songs, Op 6 **Schubert** An Silvia, D891. Ständchen, D889. Trinklied, D888 **Tippett** Songs for Ariel **Wolf** Lied des transferierten Zettel
Woolf Three Tempestuous Tunes
Nicky Spence *ten* **Malcolm Martineau** *pf*
Resonus © RES10116 (57' • DDD • T/t)



Fast-rising tenor sings songs inspired by the Bard

Rich and quite strange, to paraphrase Shakespeare, is the only possible summation of this dazzling, bewildering collection of songs written for and inspired by Shakespeare. Spence is game for anything, starting with usual suspects (Purcell, Schubert and Quilter), creating donkey noises for Wolf's 'Lied des transferierten Zettel', going to emotional depths in Argento's marvellously spare *Elizabethan Songs* and bending his pliable tenor around the Cleo Laine-ish vocal lines in John Dankworth's 'Dunsinane Blues'. Peter Dickinson's *Schubert in Blue* is a send-up of Schubert's 'Horch, horch, die Lerch', in which Spence seems to channel Ethel Merman while never sounding like anything but an English tenor. Britten and Poulenc are paired setting the same text, 'Fancie', with contrasting emotional temperature: Britten's is a *scherzo*, Poulenc's an *adagio*.

One shouldn't be expected to like all of it. Shakespeare attracts great composers of every



The boys and men of Westminster Cathedral sing music for the church year

stripe, often exercising a creative freedom that comes knowing that the play – not their music – will carry the evening. Even Haydn was coaxed into setting English-language text in his disarmingly intense ‘She never told her love’. A major presence in this starry company is the young composer Alex Woolf, whose *Three Tempestuous Tunes* strike out in many musical and dramatic directions in a matter of seconds, allowing the Shakespearean characters of his choice to address the listener with first-person immediacy.

Initially, Spence presents himself as a well-groomed, somewhat unoriginal singer who meticulously rounds phrases and applies vibrato without great thought about what the music is saying. Soon, though, one realises he is indeed original, suggesting that an undercurrent in his disc is a catalogue of singing styles. Sadly, Spence’s impetuosity leads him to over-sing, with the microphones amplifying his vocal aggression at the expense of his artistry. Couldn’t Martineau have stopped him? **David Patrick Stearns**

‘Canciones españolas’

Granados Goyescas – La maja y el ruiseñor.
Tonadillas en estilo antiguo – El majo discreto;
El majo tímido; Amor y odio; La maja de Goya;
Callejeo; El tra-la-la y el punteado; ¡Oh, muerte
cruel!; ¡Ay majo de mi vida!; De aquel majo amante
Guridi Seis Canciones castellanas **Montsalvatge**
Cinco Canciones negras **Toldrá** Abril. Maig
Turina Tres Poemas, Op 81
Sylvia Schwartz sop **Malcolm Martineau** pf
Hyperion © CDA67954 (68’ • DDD • T/I)



Sketches of Spain from soubrette soprano Schwartz

What lies beyond the usual Falla songs that represent Spanish repertoire in vocal recitals? The initial answer in this disc might be, ‘not a lot’. Following Granados’s oft-heard (and sublime) ‘La maja y el ruiseñor’ is a selection of *Tonadillas* that’s so formulaic and simplistic that even their folksy charm can’t hold the ear. Tourist music at its hoariest?

Immediately, though, the more harmonically sophisticated and emotionally entrancing world of the Guridi cycle reels you back in. Can music really capture the feeling of rarefied air? Guridi’s ‘High up on that mountain’ does. The entire cycle is a significant discovery, capturing the dark mysticism of Spanish culture with surprising turns and unexpected splashes of thick harmonic colour. Turina’s *Tres Poemas* are marvellous instances of songs that use nature descriptions to reveal intense inner states of being. The Toldrá selections are models of conversational directness. The Montsalvatge cycle is mainly known for its exotically hypnotic ‘Lullaby for a little black boy’, a favourite encore item for many a diva. Much of the rest of the cycle, though, has an ominous poetry that leaves you wanting more.

Initially, Sylvia Schwartz suffers an unfair advantage by opening her disc with the *Goyescas* selection that was recorded by Montserrat Caballé with such depth of longing that, even though seemingly out of print, is never out of memory. From there, the *Tonadillas* don’t

inspire Schwartz to any heights of vocal fantasy. But the rest of the disc suggests the presence of a major artist or at least a natural miniaturist. Hers is not a big, fruity Caballé voice but a soubrette – a voice small enough to convey subtlety without having to scale back but one that also encompasses the volatility of this repertoire without audible strain.

David Patrick Stearns

‘Miserere’

‘A Sequence of Music for Lent,

St Joseph and the Annunciation’

Bevan Magnificat quarti toni **Byrd** Emendemus in melius **Croce** In spiritu humilitatis **Guerrero** Ave virgo sanctissima **Malcolm** Miserere mei, Deus. Nunc dimittis tertii toni. Scapulis suis. Veritas mea **Mawby** Iustus ut palma **Palestrina** Missa Emendemus in melius – Kyrie; Agnus Dei **Parsons** Ave Maria **Plainchant** Attende, Domine. Audi, benigne conditor. Credo IV. Evigila super nos. Mass IX ‘Cum iubilo’. Salva nos, Domine **Tallis** Te lucis ante terminum (first setting)

Choir of Westminster Cathedral / Martin Baker

Hyperion © CDA67938 (79’ • DDD • T/I)



Mainstays of the Westminster repertoire, old and new

In purist terms, plainchant accompanied by organ harmonisation is an anachronism, and, though still widespread in church, it doesn’t often get an airing on recordings – at least not on a label like Hyperion, with its impeccable early music credentials. So it is bold of the Choir of Westminster Cathedral to begin their newest disc in this way. Then again, the intention is to record their current musical practice at various points of the year, which brings in some old favourites such as Palestrina or Parsons’s *Ave Maria* alongside music that is less often heard outside its walls: hence the emphasis on some of the choir’s erstwhile directors, notably George Malcolm, who is represented by no fewer than four pieces. It’s a strange mix, to say the least.

Does it work? Well, yes, because the choir is on excellent form and the recorded sound seems perfectly to capture a sense of place, of atmosphere. That’s indefinable and therefore worth hearing. Furthermore, everything is of a piece: the performance of the Renaissance pieces might almost be described as lush, Parsons’s *Ave Maria* building slowly (some might say ponderously) to its climaxes; yet in the context of the recording this is less rebarbative than it might be. On the other hand, I cannot get on with Malcolm’s music, which has (on this showing) a magpie quality that seldom convinces; and the other contemporary pieces aren’t to my taste either. And yet the recital’s unity of purpose is most convincing, even impressive.

Fabrice Fitch

'Open Your Eyes'

'Lieder for the Turn of a Century'

Berg Sieben frühe Lieder **Schoenberg** Brettli-Lieder
R Strauss Acht Gedichte aus 'Letzte Blätter', Op 10
Katherine Broderick *sop* **Malcolm Martineau** *pf*
Champs Hill © CHRCDO46 (66' • DDD)



German songs from
a time of decadence

A thoughtfully planned programme takes us back to the dawn of the 20th century, as heady late Romanticism was giving way to the modern era. Winner of the 2007 Kathleen Ferrier Award, Katherine Broderick has sung a wide range of repertoire since then and her varied experience pays dividends in this recital. In Strauss's early Op 10 Lieder, which she enterprisingly sings complete, she is as convincing in the lightly inflected humour of 'Nichts' as she is in the lofty sadness of 'Geduld'. In comparison with Christine Brewer (6/05), it is Broderick who offers the more detailed, flexible singing, though Brewer has the more solid voice. An edginess around the top of the stave, where the tone thins, is the main drawback here.

Given the scope of her Strauss, it is no surprise to find that Broderick is equally engaging in the contrasting demands of Berg's *Seven Early Songs* and Schoenberg's cabaret-based *Brettli-Lieder*. The Berg songs have proved a tempting prospect for Lieder singers with Wagnerian leanings and Broderick, with several Valkyries under the belt, rises to the post-*Tristan* ecstasy of 'Nacht' and 'Sommertage' generously. Accompanied with panache by Malcolm Martineau, and with the addition of a cabaret band for the last song, Schoenberg's *Brettli-Lieder* come across with just as much character as in Jessye Norman's recording (Philips, 9/93), possibly more, even if Broderick's voice is a lot less easy on the ear than Norman's plush soprano. Still, a judicious mix of not-too-brash bravado and playful sensuality makes this performance just the ticket. **Richard Fairman**

'Le rossignol et la rose'

Bellini Vanne, o rosa fortunata **Berg** Sieben frühe Lieder - Die Nachtigall **Brahms** An die Nachtigall, Op 46 No 4 **Fauré** Les roses d'Isphahan, Op 39 No 4 **Frank** Le mariage des roses. Roses et papillons **Grieg** Six Songs, Op 48 - No 4, Die verschwiegene Nachtigall; No 5, Zur Rosenzeit **Guastavino** La rosa y el sauce **Hahn** Le rossignol des lilas **Krenek** Die Nachtigall, Op 68a **Mahler** Ablösung im Sommer **Meyerbeer** Die Rosenblätter **Purcell** Sweeter than roses, Z585 No 1 **Rimsky-Korsakov** A nightingale sings to the rose, Op 2 No 2 **Saint-Saëns** Parysatis - Le rossignol et la rose **Schubert** Heidenröslein, D257 **Schumann** Die Rose, die Lilie, die Taube, die Sonne, Op 48 No 3. Meine Rose, Op 90 No 2 **Sherwin** A nightingale sang in Berkeley Square

R Strauss Rote Rosen, TrV119. Der Rosenband, Op 36 No 1 **Viardot** Les deux roses **Weber** Ich sah ein Röschen am Wege stehn, Op 15 No 5 **Zeira** Shnei Shoshanim (Two Roses)
Chen Reiss *sop* **Charles Spencer** *pf*
Onyx © ONYX4104 (72' • DDD • T/U)



Recital inspired by two
romantic archetypes

A fast-rising operatic star in Austria and Germany, Israeli soprano Chen Reiss follows her delightful CD of 18th-century arias (11/11) with a disc inspired by two archetypal romantic symbols, the nightingale and the rose. Framed by Purcell's 'Sweeter than roses' and Sherwin's 'A nightingale sang in Berkeley Square', her programme spans three centuries and seven languages, taking in such rarities as Pauline Viardot's 'Le deux roses', Guastavino's melancholy 'La rosa y el sauce' and Meyerbeer's suavely beguiling 'Die Rosenblätter'. While rapt or sorrowful reverie predominates, the mix is leavened by a clutch of humorous numbers, including Mahler's folksy nonsense song 'Ablösung im Sommer'.

Chen Reiss fields a supple, vernal lyric-coloratura that soars without strain or hardness into the stratosphere. Discerningly partnered by Charles Spencer, she can spin a pure *legato* and always phrases musically, with *rubato* growing naturally from the curve of the line and the flux of the harmony. The florid melismas and high tessitura of Krenek's 'Die Nachtigall' - in an idiom that suggests a chromatically over-ripe Richard Strauss - and the tricky, vaulting leaps of the Berg song are negotiated with effortless grace.

If her German consonants could be sharper, here and elsewhere, Reiss delivers a nicely timed and pointed 'Heidenröslein' and 'Ablösung im Sommer', and soars with *echt* Straussian radiance in the romanticised rococo of 'Das Rosenband'. Her French likewise tends to be too soft-grained, though she catches the mingled innocence and perfumed languor of Hahn's 'Le rossignol des lilas' and Fauré's exquisite 'Les roses d'Isphahan'. 'A nightingale sang in Berkeley Square' is sweetly sung but a bit careful and ladylike, not quite idiomatic. While some numbers, not least Brahms's 'An die Nachtigall' and Schumann's darkly luxuriant 'Meine Rose', could benefit from more specific characterisation and tonal variety, this is a more-than-promising recital from a soprano whose vocal ease and allure make her an artist to watch. **Richard Wigmore**

'Virgins, Vixens & Viragos'

Berlioz La mort d'Ophélie **Duke** Ages ago **Duparc** Romance de Mignon **Horovitz** Lady Macbeth (scena) **Liszt** Mignons Lied, S275 **Porter** The Physician **Poulenc** Les chemins de l'amour. Fiançailles pour rire **Purcell** The Blessed Virgin's

Expostulation, Z196 **M Rodgers** The boy from...
Schubert Heiss mich nicht reden, D877 No 2
Schumann So lasst mich scheinen, Op 98a
No 9 **Tchaikovsky** Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt
Wolf Goethe-Lieder - Kennst du das Land
Susan Graham *mez* **Malcolm Martineau** *pf*
Onyx © ONYX4105 (75' • DDD • T/U)



Graham and Martineau
on three female mindsets

I can't think of another singer today who could match Susan Graham in an eclectic programme ranging across three centuries, four languages and a diverse array of idioms. The virgins take pride of place here: Purcell's Mary, Berlioz's Ophelia and the otherworldly waif Mignon from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*. In glowing voice, Graham opens with a richly imagined, deeply felt performance of Purcell's quasi-operatic scena, culminating in repeated cries on 'Gabriel' of almost excruciating intensity. The Berlioz is likewise profoundly 'lived', with a wide range of colour that includes a haunting, blanched *pianissimo* on the final melisma. In 'Heiss mich nicht reden' Graham makes Mignon rather grander than the text and Schubert's fragile, unearthly music imply. But she is superb in the other Mignon songs, catching unerringly each successive phase of reverie, yearning and impassioned desperation. Abetted by Malcolm Martineau's richly coloured playing, she relishes the operatic afflatus of Liszt's 'Kennst du das Land', while the dark Russian vowels of the Tchaikovsky song unlock a new contralto depth within her bright-tinted mezzo.

Vixens may be in short supply here but there is one indisputable virago in Lady Macbeth, three of whose speeches are juxtaposed in Joseph Horovitz's declamatory scena. The (to my ears) less than riveting music is partly vindicated by Graham's commanding portrayal, not least in the mounting panic, fading into numbed eeriness, of the closing speech. In Poulenc's bittersweet cycle *Fiançailles pour rire* (the composer's title is deceptive), Graham and Martineau catch the sensuality of the opening song without traducing the composer's request for simplicity, and perfectly judge the mix of aristocratic refinement and Montmartre cabaret languor in 'Violon'. 'Il vole' (the fiendish keyboard part brilliantly despatched by Martineau) is all panting excitement, even if Graham sometimes blurs the tumbling consonants of this near tongue-twister. On Broadway - in numbers by Vernon Duke, Cole Porter and Mary Rodgers (with words by Sondheim) - she finds a relaxed, popular style without compromising vocal quality. Sung with irresistible wit and pizzazz, Rodgers and Sondheim's crazy bossa nova 'The boy from...' sets the seal on a recital of rare versatility and panache. **Richard Wigmore**

Opera



Mike Ashman on a new version of Cherubini's masterpiece, *Médée*:

'Nadja Michael's identification with the title-role is first-rate and borders (rightly) on the psychotic' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 77**



David Vickers on Vivaldi's 'first run' at Orlando furioso:

'Sardelli's conscientious experiment opens up an intriguing new perspective into Vivaldi's encounter with the story' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 81**

Adams



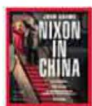
Nixon in China

James Maddalena bar Richard Nixon
Janis Kelly sop Pat Nixon
Richard Paul Fink bar Henry Kissinger
Robert Brubaker ten Mao Tse-tung
Kathleen Kim sop Madame Mao (Chiang Ch'ing)
Russell Braun bar Chou En-lai
Ginger Costa-Jackson mez

..... First Secretary (Nancy T'ang)
Teresa S Herold mez Second Secretary
Tamara Mumford mez Third Secretary
Chorus and Orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera,
New York / John Adams

Stage and video director **Peter Sellars**

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NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • Dolby TrueHD 24-bit surround/
stereo • 0 • s). Recorded live, February 12, 2011



Metropolitan debut for Adams's first 'CNN opera'

Beware of hyperbole. Words such as 'masterpiece' are freely tossed about in the commentary surrounding the Metropolitan Opera debut of *Nixon in China*, putting an awful weight on a piece that is still gaining a footing in the repertoire. Unlike *Peter Grimes*, *Nixon in China* wasn't a fully realised bolt out of the blue. It stood on the shoulders of Philip Glass's oratorio-like *Satyagraha*, though with a more textured narrative that steered the post-minimalist aesthetic closer to the traditional story-telling of mainstream opera. But not until Act 3, with its jaunty echoes of the orchestral work *The Chairman Dances* and eloquent soliloquies given to each major character, can *Nixon in China* be mentioned in the same breath as Adams's far more evolved *El Niño* and *Doctor Atomic*.

Until then, it's a first-effort opera in many ways. Though Adams had written highly characteristic works such as *Harmonielehre* when *Nixon in China* was premiered in 1987, he fell back on Glass's less flexible minimalism even as the libretto strikes out in many theatrical directions – a documentary in the Nixon/Mao meeting, a dreamy Chinese pastorate in Pat Nixon's tour of the country and a surreal free-for-all in the brutal Red Detachment of Women ballet (choreographed

by Mark Morris). In the aria 'News, news, news, news', Nixon participates in the scene while narrating it but without music that's suitably agile to pull it off – or the smokescreen of assumed satirical undercurrent that audiences once brought to the opera.

Now that its subject matter is no longer novel, the opera is more serious. With dark, wintry stage designs by Adrienne Lobel and singers who more readily wrap their voices around Adams's vocal lines, stage director Peter Sellars draws less physically animated, more earnest, detailed performances. Sympathy for the disgraced president was hard to come by in 1987 but here, James Maddalena (though not in his best voice) portrays a more noble Nixon pushed to his diplomatic limits. The heart of the opera is Pat Nixon, portrayed by Janis Kelly with less sense of submission and a lot more depth. Russell Braun's Chou En-lai projects vision and intelligence in his voice but shows the world a stern, stone face – except when in pain since, as we now know, he had untreated pancreatic cancer. Was Mao senile or foxy? Robert Brubaker keeps you guessing. The Mao-ettes (a trio of secretaries) are no longer played for laughs. When everybody turns in for the night in the final scene, the beds now become coffins for Chou and Mao. Given Sellars's penchant for tight camera close-ups in his video direction, the opera often feels like the intimate chamber work that, in its conflicted heart, it actually wants to be.

David Patrick Stearns

Bellini



I Puritani

Mariola Cantarero sop Elvira
John Osborn ten Arturo
Scott Hendricks bar Riccardo
Riccardo Zanellato bass Giorgio
Fredrika Brillembourg mez Enrichetta
Daniel Borowski bass Gualtiero
Gregorio Gonzalez bar Bruno

Chorus of Netherlands Opera; Netherlands
Philharmonic Orchestra / Giuliano Carella

Stage director **Francisco Negrin**

Video director **Misjel Vermeiren**

Opus Arte © DVD OA1091D; © Blu-ray OABD7111D (173' +
10' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080p • DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, October 2009



Negrin's 2009 *Puritani* for the Netherlands Opera

I Puritani was Bellini's last opera, commissioned by the Théâtre Italien in Paris and performed with a star cast – the famous 'Puritani quartet' of Giulia Grisi, Rubini, Tamburini and Lablache – in January 1835. This production is based on a new edition which restores material normally omitted, including a trio and a section of the Act 3 duet for the lovers.

Some puzzling aspects of the staging are explained in two short 'extra' features. Francesco Negrin views the libretto as 'silly and not making much sense': what Elvira says is unacceptable to the other characters and she goes mad 'because she can't express herself'. And Es Devlin's set design incorporates a text from the New Testament in Braille to symbolise the Puritans' blindness. What isn't explained is why Arturo is shot instead of joining Elvira in a happy ending.

So this is not going to please anyone looking for a traditional approach to Queen Victoria's 'dear *Puritani*'. On the other hand, Negrin gets some excellent performances from his cast, who are able to express emotion without being either hammy or cheesy. Scott Hendricks as the rejected lover sings nobly after a gusty start. Riccardo Zanellato glances at the conductor rather too often but he is equally believable. John Osborn manages a stupendous top F, non-falsetto, and his singing in the trio, lyrical but desperate, is even more wonderful.

Mariola Cantarero, in an unbecoming auburn wig, impresses both in *legato* and in coloratura. Apart from an over-fast 'Suoni la tromba', Giuliano Carella conducts more than capably. Go on, give it a whirl.

Richard Lawrence

Britten

Billy Budd

Jacques Imbraillo bar Billy Budd
John Mark Ainsley ten Captain Vere
Philip Ens bass John Claggart
Iain Paterson bass-bar Mr Redburn
Matthew Rose bass Mr Flint



The Chinese way: James Maddalena as the President with Janis Kelly as Pat Nixon in the Metropolitan Opera's first staging of John Adams's *Nixon in China*

Darren Jeffery *bass-bar* Lt Ratcliffe
 Alasdair Elliott *ten* Red Whiskers
 John Moore *bar* Donald
 Jeremy White *bass* Dansker
 Ben Johnson *ten* Novice
 Colin Judson *ten* Squeak
 Richard Mosley-Evans *bar* Bosun
 Glyndebourne Chorus; London Philharmonic
 Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder
 Glyndebourne 10 3 GFOCD017-10 (164' • DDD • S/T)
 Recorded live, May & June 2010



Glyndebourne's own sound for 2010 *Billy Budd* on CD

This is getting confusing: the Glyndebourne Festival DVD of *Billy Budd* (9/11) is now followed by a CD of the same production, made (at least partly) on different dates. Divorced from Michael Grandage's rather insipid production, it makes a strong entry in the purely audio stakes. The unexpected advantage is that the recording is much better than on the festival's other recent Britten CDs. Helped perhaps by the acoustic properties of the set – an enveloping ship's interior – the voices project clearly. We feel as if we are out on deck, yet the balance with the orchestra is very good. With the exception of the scene of the aborted naval battle, where the principals were at the back of the stage, almost every word can be heard in this vividly immediate live recording. The cast stands up

well against existing rivals. Jacques Imbrailo makes a marvellously youthful, innocent-sounding Billy Budd and his lyrical singing of Billy's solo scene before his execution is heart-rending. He is fortunate to have such a sympathetic Captain Vere in John Mark Ainsley, who makes up for a voice on the light side by his understanding for this tortured man of the enlightenment (how true rings the line 'I have studied men and their ways'). After an uncertain start, Phillip Ens grows into a Claggart of authority and there are appreciable portrayals from Matthew Rose as Mr Flint and Iain Paterson as Mr Redburn. Mark Elder gets first-rate playing from the London Philharmonic Orchestra and directs an often powerful performance, which loses momentum temporarily in Captain Vere's cabin in Act 1 but returns there for a blistering account of the trial scene in Act 2.

A single recommendation is difficult. Britten's own recording is the most consistently compelling and has a sturdy cast (Michael Langdon's Claggart has perhaps been underrated). Hickox's Chandos set has the best central trio – Langridge, Keenlyside and Tomlinson – but does not quite recreate the tense atmosphere of the opera house. This new Glyndebourne certainly does, running feet, cannon and all. **Richard Fairman**

Selected comparisons:

Britten (9/68*, 6/89) (LOND) 417 428-2LH3

Hickox (6/00) (CHAN) CHAN9826

Cherubini



Médée

Nadja Michael *sop* Médée
 Kurt Streit *ten* Jason
 Vincent Le Texier *bass-bar* Créon
 Christianne Stotijn *mez* Nérès
 Hendrickje van Kerckhove *sop* Dircé
 Gaëlle Arquez *mez* Maid-servant I
 Anne-Fleur Inizan *mez* Maid-servant II
 Chorus of La Monnaie; Les Talens Lyriques /
 Christophe Rousset

Stage director Krzysztof Warlikowski

Video director Stéphane Metge

Bel Air Classiques 2 DVD BAC076; 3 BAC476
 (138' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080p • DTS-HD MA, DD5.1 &
 PCM stereo • O • s). Recorded live, September 2011



Warlikowski's 2011 *Médée* on screen from Brussels

Cherubini's masterpiece, performed in French and without the sprawling 1855 recitatives by Franz Lachner that have stymied modern performances for over a century, has not received a proper first-class recorded performance until this one. Authenticists should note that there are small musical cuts and repeats not taken (which aligns the version given closely with the revisions Cherubini himself made for Vienna in 1809). François-Benoît Hoffman's (perishable) dialogue has been 'adapted' – aka replaced – by an effective, but much shortened, modern version by



Talent on show: Christophe Rousset and his period-instrument band performing Dauvergne's *Hercule mourant*

director Krzysztof Warlikowski and dramaturg Christian Longchamp. Use of modern idiom in the latter (eg 'Fous le camp') pleased the premiere audience of this staging (in Brussels, where this revival was filmed in September 2011) but offended some sensitive souls in a Paris revival this last autumn.

Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques draw the fire and flood from a score that is the true godfather of *Fidelio*, *Der Freischütz* and much Wagner (try the thrilling prelude to Act 3) – nowhere more so than in the orchestra's fugal firestorm which closes the evening, an immolation scene in barely three minutes. Dressed as a succession of modern-day witch/goddesses – first Amy Winehouse, then Christina Aguilera – Nadja Michael's identification with the title-role, physically and vocally, is first-rate and borders (rightly) on the psychotic, while Kurt Streit (in heroic dreadlocks) is ideal as the weak, indecisive, torn Jason.

Warlikowski's production plays in a deliberately unfriendly modern studio with plastic see-through medical curtains, a sand pit, glaring lights and a chest of drawers where Médée (and her servant Nérès – Christianne Stotijn, excellent in her major Act 2 aria of sympathy) keep her props, clothes and souvenirs. The director nails precisely the atmosphere of doubt and fear that Cherubini and Hoffman establish from the word go: Médée will come for revenge and will not be

stopped by the 'appeasers' Jason and Créon – let alone the latter's daughter Dircé, Jason's new intended (rightly played by Hendrickje van Kerckhove as a woman on the verge of a terminal nervous breakdown). The director's choice of apt images of useless resistance reaches a peak when the only threat Créon and his men can make to Médée to leave Corinth consists of unison banging of plastic water bottles in time on their cupped hands.

This performance here outpaces well-meant attempts from the Courtis/Patrizia Ciofi live 2008 set (Nuova Era) and the complete but often challenged Bart Folsie/Opera Quotannis 1997 Lincoln Center recording (Newport Classics). Every aspect of this production is a triumph vindicating Cherubini's forward-looking genius. **Mike Ashman**

Dauvergne

Hercule mourant

Andrew Foser-Williams *bass*.....Hercule
Véronique Gens *sop*.....Déjanire
Emiliano Gonzalez Toro *ten*.....Hilus
Edwin Crossley-Mercer *bar*.....Philoctète
Julie Fuchs *sop*.....Iole
Jaël Azzaretti *sop*.....Dircé
Alain Buet *bass*.....La Jalousie/Jupiter
Jennifer Borghi *mez*.....Juno
Romain Champion *ten*.....Le Grand Prête de Jupiter
Chorus of the Versailles Centre for Baroque Music;
Les Talens Lyriques / Christophe Rousset
Aparté ② APO42 (138' • DDD • S/T/I)

Recorded live at the Opéra Royal, Versailles,
November 19, 2011

Dauvergne

La vénitienne

Katia Velletaz *sop*.....Léonore
Chantal Santon *sop*.....Isabelle
Kareen Durand *sop*.....Spinette
Isabelle Cals *sop*.....Isménide
Mathias Vidal *ten*.....Octave
Alain Buet *bass*.....Zerbin
Namur Chamber Choir; Les Agréments /
Guy van Waas

Ricercar ② RIC327 (116' • DDD • S/T/I)

Recorded live, Liège, November 2011



Two operas by tercentenary celebrant and Rameau pupil Dauvergne

This year is the tercentenary of Antoine Dauvergne (1713-97). From 1744 Rameau's pupil rose through the ranks of the Académie Royale de Musique (ie the Paris Opéra) and in 1769 was appointed one of its directors. Remembered by historians for his initially reluctant negotiations to bring Gluck to Paris in the early 1770s, Dauvergne's music was criticised by Burney as 'very dull and heavy... in the oldest and worst French style' but his merits are commemorated in timely fashion by two live concert recordings, both made in

November 2011 in association with the Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles.

The libretto of the *tragédie lyrique* *Hercule mourant* (1761) by Jean-François Marmontel is influenced by Sophocles's tale of the jealous Deianira's inadvertent murder of her husband Hercules. Contemporaries praised the decor of the terrible scene in which Hercules burns on a funeral pyre but sharp division arose over the music: one critic joked that 'the whole opera ought to be thrown on the pyre in the fifth act', whereas Dauvergne's supporters protested it was 'ingenious, light and stimulating'. Christophe Rousset's theatrical pacing is spot-on; Les Talens Lyriques are on fine form in the lithe Overture; and dances are played with a keen sense of balletic movement. Véronique Gens's authoritative recitatives convey the swinging emotional fortunes of the anxious Déjanire; her vitriolic reaction to news of Hercule's secret plan to marry his beautiful captive Iole brings Act 2 to a strong climax. Iole's idyllic pastoral 'Quelle voix suspend mes alarmes?' is sung sweetly by Julie Fuchs. Hercules's bitter shame at his unworthy deceit of his wife at the start of Act 3 is sung commandingly by Andrew Foster-Williams, accompanied by a dark orchestration dominated by bassoons.

Dauvergne's ill-fated *comédie lyrique* *La vénitienne* (1768) was condemned by one cynical eyewitness as 'a tedious piece of drollery' but Benoît Dratwicki's essay claims that it bridges 'the gap between Rameau and Pergolesi'. The elegant playing of Les Agréments conveys the opera's charms; the convivial Overture has a beguiling *Largo* featuring rolling woodwinds and *pizzicato* strings, whereas the outer quick movements offer shades of Haydn. The light-hearted plot of Venetian lovers reconciled after bizarre escapades warranted a frothy score packed with short tuneful arias (it is hard to spot them in *Hercule mourant*) and amusing orchestral interludes. The lovely opening scene in which Léonore wistfully wishes that she had sooner known the delights of falling in love ('Tendres plaisirs') sets the scene of St Mark's Square rather less than a pastoral scene straight out of a painting by Fragonard. A chorus of boatmen tenderly implore the Zephyrs who rule the waves to grant days of happiness, thus introducing a divertissement of attractive dances (including a delightful barcarolle). The first scenes of Act 2 contain orchestral passages of mock-serious storminess as the amorous Venetian nobleman Octave and his long-suffering valet Zerbin switch clothes in order to seek counsel from the sorceress Isménide; the fearful Zerbin drinks himself to sleep in an astonishingly gorgeous soft aria ('Livrons-nous au sommeil'). It is incredible that these dissimilar operas were written by the same composer but each repays investigation.

David Vickers

Handel

Giulio Cesare in Egitto

Ann Murray *contr* Giulio Cesare
Susan Gritton *sop* Cleopatra
Patricia Bardon *contr* Cornelia
Katarina Karnéus *mez* Sextus
Christopher Robson *counterten* Ptolemy
Marcello Lippi *bass* Achilla
Jan Zinkler *bass* Curio
Axel Köhler *counterten* Nireus
Bavarian State Orchestra / Ivor Bolton
Farao Ⓢ Ⓢ B108090 (168' • DDD • S/T)
Recorded live at Bavarian State Opera, 2002

Handel

Giulio Cesare in Egitto

Marie-Nicole Lemieux *contr* Giulio Cesare
Karina Gauvin *sop* Cleopatra
Romina Basso *mez* Cornelia
Emöke Baráth *sop* Sextus
Filippo Mineccia *counterten* Ptolemy
Johannes Weisser *bar* Achilla
Gianluca Buratto *bass* Curio
Milena Storti *mez* Nireus
Il Complesso Barocco / Alan Curtis
Naïve Ⓢ Ⓢ OP30536 (3h 41' • DDD)



A decade separates Handel's masterpiece from Curtis in the studio and Bolton live

The vast discography of *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (1724) is a proverbial mixed bag. The Bavarian State Opera's 1994 production typified the modernist traditionalism of ridiculous concepts invented to stop the audience from getting too bored with Handel's work. Sir Peter Jonas's polemical booklet-note insinuates that anyone who disagrees with such a supposedly 'relevant' approach is clearly not intelligent enough, but it is not difficult to understand the damaging impact of heavy cuts and ending Act 2 in the wrong place. Ivor Bolton's coaching of the Bavarian orchestra results in a convincing pseudo-Baroque style; Cesare's 'Va tacito e nascosto' is diminished by its reckless briskness; but I am glad to have heard Susan Gritton's moving performance of 'Se pietà'.

Even accomplished studio versions of the opera are seldom consistently satisfying, so there is room for Alan Curtis's stylistic sincerity, fidelity to the unabridged text and sensible casting. In a few previous projects Il Complesso Barocco's playing sounded disengaged from the emotional ebb and flow of the drama but on this occasion it never seems perfunctory. Judiciously paced recitatives are accompanied unobtrusively and always permit the poetry to flow with the utmost clarity; this allows the listener to absorb the delivery of characters' lines. It is a refreshing antidote to Baroque opera performances which seem obsessed with hurrying up as much as possible

in order to get to the next aria, or spice up the continuo parts to distraction.

Curtis wisely pays diligent attention to Handel's tempo markings: Cesare's 'Empio, dirò, tu sei' has righteous anger but is not so rushed that the words are lost; the mournful *ombra* music in the middle of Sesto's vengeance aria 'Svegliatevi nel core' is ideally spellbinding, whereas its fast sections are dogmatic enough to convey determination rather than merely superficial volatility. Tolomeo's spiteful 'L'empio, sleale, indegno' is adeptly characterised by the animated strings, and Cesare's 'Va tacito e nascosto' is judged astutely as a stealthy conspiratorial aside to the audience. A genuine effort has been made to make the onstage band in the Parnassus scene ('V'adoro pupille') sound from a distance and the spatial texture with the rest of the orchestra is beguiling.

There are no weak links vocally. Marie-Nicole Lemieux is a dependable Cesare and Karina Gauvin is an eloquent, steely Cleopatra. Emöke Baráth's Sesto is ideally fresh-voiced and Romina Basso is a perfect fit for Cornelia; their unforced voices blend together exquisitely in an achingly beautiful performance of the duet 'Son nata a lagrimar'. It also seems right that Johannes Weisser sings Achilla's 'Tu se il cor' initially as an attempt to be genuinely seductive rather than to clumsily bully Cornelia from the outset. My only reservation is that in some slower arias fiddly embellishments seem convoluted where I would have liked to sense Handel's melodic genius breathing more freely. However, Curtis's outstanding performance ranks comfortably alongside George Petrou's dissimilar (and occasionally quirky) version as the most satisfying studio recordings of Handel's most famous opera. David Vickers

Selected comparison:

Petrou (8/10) (MDG) MDG609 1604-2

Telemann

Flavius Bertaridus

Maite Beaumont *contr* Flavius Bertaridus
Nina Bernsteiner *sop* Rodelinda
Ann-Beth Solvang *mez* Flavia
Antonio Abete *bass* Grimoaldus
Katerina Tretyakova *sop* Cunibert
Jürgen Sacher *ten* Orontes
David DQ Lee *counterten* Onulfus
Mélissa Petit *sop* Regimbert
Accademia Montis Regalis / Alessandro De Marchi
Deutsche Harmonia Mundi Ⓢ Ⓢ 88691 92605-2
(3h 25' • DDD)
Recorded live, Innsbruck, August 2011



Telemann's operatic 'missing link', live from Innsbruck

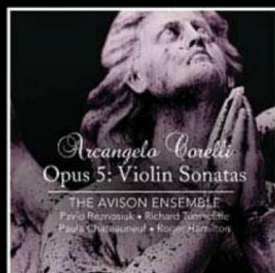
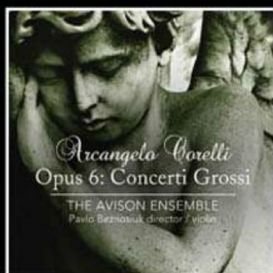
Most of Telemann's operas for Hamburg's Gänsemarkt theatre are lost. One of the few exceptions is *Flavius Bertaridus* (1729), which

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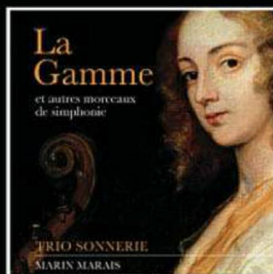
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Sony claims is 'absolutely a missing link in the opera repertoire'. It is based on the same story as Handel's *Rodelinda*: seventh-century Lombard king Flavius Bertaridus returns home in disguise, hoping to rescue his wife Rodelinda and recover his throne from the usurper Grimoaldus. As was typical for Hamburg, the peculiar libretto presents action and arias in German but slips in about a dozen Italian arias.

It seems that Alessandro de Marchi exercised artistic licence upon Telemann's orchestrations for a production at the Innsbruck Festival of Early Music in 2011. Moreover, some cuts, reallocations and alterations to the plot are briefly summarised in the booklet. The original Overture is lost, so an earlier French-style piece is used instead. Aside from deficiencies in the lifeless recorded sound, Accademia Montis Regalis play the Overture in a clumsily inelegant manner that hardly does Telemann any favours; the violins sound peculiarly compressed and there are intonation problems. The opening scene establishes the pattern of laboured recitatives and unevenly performed arias. Few singers emerge with much credit; nasal coloratura, ropy phrasing and over-forced singing are prevalent. The warts-and-all live recording has not served them well.

Telemann created some intriguing musical moments, such as 'Es nehmen die Flammen' (a florid tenor aria for Orontes, with refrains for chorus), which is followed by Rodelinda's lullaby to her sleeping son Cunibert ('Dormi pure, amato figlio'); it is a pity Nina Bernstein sings with harsh vibrato and variable tuning but she does much better with her poignant prison scene in Act 3 ('Gemahl und Sohnes Angedenken'). Orontes has several charming love songs featuring poetic instrumental obbligatos but they are all butchered by Jürgen Sacher's unstylish bellowing. Act 2 opens with a lovely accompanied recitative and pastoral aria replete with nightingale recorders for Flavia (Grimoaldus's long-suffering wife), but Ann-Beth Solvang sings them stridently. Maïte Beaumont makes a better fist of the title-role: his secretive homecoming aria 'Cari lidi' (with fussy bassoon obbligato) is hardly on a par with Handel's counterpart, 'Dove sei', but the climactic heroic trumpet aria 'Lieto suono ti trombe guerriere' is splendid fun. Not so much 'a missing link' as a glass that is only half-full.

David Vickers

Vivaldi

Orlando furioso (1714 version, RV819)

Riccardo Novaro bar	Orlando
Teodora Gheorghiu sop	Angelica
Romina Basso mez	Alcina
Gaëlle Arquez mez	Bradamante
Delfine Galou contr	Medoro
David DQ Lee counterten	Ruggiero
Roberta Mameli sop	Astolfo

Modo Antiquo / Federico Maria Sardelli

Naïve © 2013 OP30540 (111' • DDD)



Vivaldi's first thoughts on the story he would return to later

In autumn 1713 Vivaldi took over management of opera at Venice's Teatro S Angelo and put on a production of Giovanni Alberto Ristori's *Orlando furioso*. He also initiated a revival on December 1, 1714, and for many years it was assumed that only minimal alterations were made to Ristori's music; but recently musicologists have scrutinised the sole surviving manuscript (now in Turin) more closely. Extensive revisions indicate that Vivaldi systematically replaced Ristori's arias, even during the 1713 run of performances, and by the time of the 1714 revival the music seems to have been almost entirely rewritten by Vivaldi. This recording presents not so much a rediscovery (as it might be inaccurately hyped) but a reconsideration of authorship.

Federico Maria Sardelli's meticulously detailed booklet-note explains that the Turin manuscript lacks Act 3 and also has a number of arias missing or without important parts: 'Not wanting to burden the world with new *pasticcios*, I rejected out of hand the idea of reconstructing the missing third act. However, I did set out to tackle the problematic status of the incomplete arias.' Hence this recording presents Sardelli's editorial completion, assisted by Frédéric Delaméa, of the existing material for only Acts 1 and 2. Consequently, *Modo Antiquo*'s spirited performance cannot be experienced as a coherent dramatic whole, but it is to the credit of the performers that they strive for dramatic conviction. The devious Alcina is sung expertly by Romina Basso and Teodora Gheorghiu's Angelica suitably protests far too much in her deception of Orlando ('Tu sei degli occhi miei'). Three seemingly intact scenes are highlights: Astolfo, restored to human form when freed from Alcina's curse, warns Ruggiero to flee from the sorceress in 'Ah, fuggi rapido' (sung vibrantly by Roberta Mameli); after Ruggiero is cured by the steadfast Bradamante, his remorse is tenderly expressed by David DQ Lee in the intimate continuo aria 'Piangerò' (featuring lyrical cello obbligato); Act 2 ends effectively with Orlando venting his heartbreak and rage upon discovering Angelica's marriage to Medoro (Riccardo Novaro's resonant bass ideally invites pathos). Sardelli's conscientious experiment opens up an intriguing new perspective into Vivaldi's encounter with a story to which he would return in 1727 for his famous masterpiece. David Vickers

'Romantic Arias'

Nicolai Die Heimkehr des Verbannten – Norton! Du bist es, der mit Frevler-Wut...Verfehmt kehrt er ins

Vaterland[®] **Schubert** Alfonso und Estrella – O sing mir, Vater...Der Jäger ruhte hingegossen[®]; Sei mir gegrüßt, o Sonne. Der Graf von Gleichen – O Himmel...Mein Weib, o Gott, mein süßes Knabe **Schumann** Genoveva – Ja, wart' du bis zum jüngsten Tag[®] **Wagner** Tannhäuser – Blick' ich umher in diesem edlen Kreise. Wie Todesahnung...O du, mein holder Abendstern **Weber** Euryanthe – Wo berg' ich mich?...So weih' ich mich den Rachgewalten **Christian Gerhaher** bar[®] **Maximilian Schmitt** ten **Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra / Daniel Harding** Sony Classical © 88725 42295-2 (62' • DDD)



Gerhaher in rarities and roles he has made his own

The baritone and his delightfully Goethean-named producer Wilhelm Meister stick strictly to the historical definition of the disc's title, 'Romantic Arias', but come up with a most uncliché repertoire list. The nearest to 'pop' items are two revisits to the role that, in the UK at least, has become Gerhaher's calling card – Wagner's Wolfram von Eschenbach. Elsewhere we get unfinished Schubert (his last opera, *Der Graf von Gleichen*, in Richard Dünser's completion), Siegfried (from Schumann's *Genoveva*), rare Nicolai (tell me you've heard of *Die Heimkehr des Verbannten*) and Lysiart's storming vengeance aria – and Telramund marker – from Act 2 of *Euryanthe*. And some characteristically gutsy accompaniments under Daniel Harding. And an ingenious booklet-note, 'Was Deutsch und echt' by Michael Wittmann, which should be read carefully by all Wagnerians. (Was Wagner truly a lonely pioneer in his quest for a German opera free of French or Italian influence? Indeed he wasn't.)

Encouraged by the disc's challenging repertoire, let's play the game of promoter. Which of these operas, excepting *Tannhäuser* and *Euryanthe* (which, as any fule kno, is a work of genius and should be in every house's repertoire), would you rush to put on given the evidence of these performances? All are in Gerhaher's best style, immaculately phrased and breathed, with considerable thought given to the text which is then fully characterised without mannerism. So a good case is made for all – but the Schumann scene and the Nicolai (replete with substantial cello solo) have the biggest contrasts and most substantial music drama. Schubert, even the almost-known *Alfonso und Estrella*, flatters to deceive as we hunt in vain for the drama of the Lieder and the orchestral colouring of the symphonies.

Not a programme to be played in one go – too much 'noble' suffering at *andante*-ish tempi that's not broken up until Weber's final raging – but a great source for dipping into the history of this period.

Mike Ashman

Books



Jeremy Nicholas on a study of the early British recording industry:

'We read of the pioneer movers and shakers, the cunning, the ambitious and the enterprising'



David Gutman reviews the third volume of Prokofiev's diaries:

'Prokofiev's witty put-downs are a delight but a lack of empathy limits his reliability as an observer of human behaviour'

Recording History

The British Record Industry, 1888-1931

By Peter Martland

Scarecrow Press, HB, 408pp, £49.95

ISBN 978-0-8108-8252-2 (ebook 978-0-8108-8253-9)



Dr Martland of Pembroke College, Cambridge, began his career as an economic historian.

As an author he performs an unusual double act by writing books about the recording industry and the British secret intelligence community. His first foray into the former, following a PhD thesis on the business history of the Gramophone Company from 1897 to 1918, was a book commissioned to celebrate the centenary of EMI: *Since Records Began: EMI – The First 100 Years* (Batsford: 1997). Based on both these earlier works, Martland's new book takes the story forwards to 1931, the year in which financial circumstance forced the Gramophone Company to merge with its greatest rival, the Columbia Graphophone Company, while also charting the rise and fall of many other early competitors. It is, to quote the book's blurb, 'a work of economic and cultural history that draws on a vast range of quantitative data [and] surveys the commercial and business activities of the British record industry like no other volume has done before' – or, I would add, is ever likely to do in the future.

Amid the 'quantitative data' (a phrase that deftly characterises the book's appeal), we read of the pioneer movers and shakers, the cunning, the ambitious and the enterprising; and the evolution of the cylinder recording, sales of which far outstripped their disc equivalent in Britain until the whole trade collapsed in 1908. The narrative is dominated, understandably, by the development of the British recording industry (the author has had full access to EMI's extensive archives).

Dr Martland is nothing if not thorough and the ready availability of such a wealth of detailed information makes it an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the business side of the recording industry. Any future rival volume on the subject will be

redundant. Its litany of takeovers, patents, buyouts and mergers will make stimulating bedtime reading for some; for others it will be like ploughing through the book of Ezra (chapter 8, say). Inserted into the text are 60 tables showing sales figures, profit-and-loss accounts and the like. Table 5.2, for instance, has the turnover, net profit, fees, taxes and dividend, retained profit and reserves for the Gramophone Company, 1900-14; Table 5.6 has the dividend, earnings per share, share high, share low and per cent dividend of high for the same period.

Those expecting an anecdotal troll through the correspondence archives will be disappointed; and, until the latter part of the book, references in the text to the artists or composers whose talents made the fortunes of these enterprising recording pioneers (and vice versa) are as rare as hen's teeth. Dr Martland's principal interest is in their earnings. Here, for example, are the comparative sales and earnings of the Gramophone Company's biggest-selling artists (all singers): Caruso, Chaliapine [*sic*], McCormack, Melba and Tetrassini. We learn that Paderewski's 1911 four-year thirty-record contract netted the artist nearly £5,000 and are reminded that the 1927 Temple Church recording of Mendelssohn's *Hear My Prayer* (with the aria 'O, for the wings of a dove' sung by Ernest Lough) became the first British million-selling recording (a fact repeated some 24 pages later), still comfortably outselling in 1938 its nearest rivals, the Savoy Orpheans, Ben Selvin's Novelty Orchestra and even Gracie Fields singing 'My Blue Heaven'. The advent of this journal is duly acknowledged: 'With a start-up capital of £2000, the magazine was aimed at the educated but not necessarily musically sophisticated individual', as well as 'those skilled and semiskilled working-class consumers who had traditionally bought recorded music'.

There is a good index, a currency converter, glossary, a separate list of all the figures and tables presented in the text, and nearly 50 black-and-white photographs. The full-colour laminated hard cover is remarkable for its unalluring design and

appearance, the kind usually encountered in discount retailers with titles like '1000 Best Pub Quiz Questions' and not generally associated with scholarly, assiduously researched, definitive histories. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Sergey Prokofiev Diaries 1924-1933: Prodigal Son

Translated and annotated by Anthony Phillips

Faber & Faber, HB, 800pp, £30

ISBN 978-0-571-23405-9



Prokofiev scholarship used to be stymied by a dearth of source material. Not so today. This

third and final instalment of the composer's diaries is even more substantial than its predecessors. One encomium reprinted on the dust jacket suggests that the project 'will come to be ranked among the great classic diaries of European literature'. That may be going too far but the present offering should appeal well beyond Prokofiev's immediate fan base to readers intrigued by the siren song of Christian Science and/or sympathetic to an outsider's take on the Diaghilev set.

Published writings and public pronouncements attributed to Prokofiev after his fateful relocation to Stalin's Moscow in 1936 were apt to rewrite the past to suit official dogma. Hence the special value of the private testimony offered here – potentially as game-changing as Shostakovich's disputed memoirs, with the obvious advantage that the Prokofiev journals are indubitably genuine. The composer's manuscript notebooks, including entries in a vowel-free shorthand analogous to the system he devised to set down orchestral scores on the hoof, were deciphered initially by his son, Svyatoslav (who will have unearthed an unflattering description of himself as a baby, 'purple and hideous'). Svyatoslav in turn was assisted by his son, another Sergey. Published initially in Russian, the material began appearing in informal though elegant English in 2006.

The assiduous translator is Anthony Phillips, who renders the composer's prose



Candid but cautious: Prokofiev the diarist

in a cryptic, frequently acerbic style that certainly resonates with the early piano music. And his biographical footnotes can be as instructive as the main text. That said, while Prokofiev's witty put-downs are a delight, a lack of empathy limits his reliability as a critic and observer of human behaviour. He is quick to condemn, which can be fun but leads to inconsistency and even a certain prudishness. Irked, understandably enough, by Diaghilev's partiality for younger talent, he cannot see beyond the eclectic flirtatiousness of Poulenc's *Les biches*, while the durability of Balanchine's choreography for his own *Prodigal Son* would have astonished him. Prokofiev's human side is perhaps most fully engaged when he strives

unsuccessfully to defend a nest full of young birds from the attentions of a marauding cat. He continues to dole out money to his indolent poet pal, Boris Verin (Boris Nikolayevich Bashkirov), much to his wife's annoyance. And his beloved Mama dies in his arms – there are no entries for a while after that.

The big surprises of this third volume are the frequency of his contacts with Rachmaninov and Stravinsky, something the latter found it politic to play down in later life, and the extent of his own involvement with Christian Science. This went well beyond an exploration of Mary Baker Eddy's metaphysics to an active reliance on focused prayer for the healing of minor ailments, the alleviation

of marital discord and the overcoming of aerophobia. More regular church attendance is inhibited by the 'bad music' he finds there. Prokofiev wrote no religious music as conventionally understood. However, neither his brand of positive thinking, nor his return to diatonic composition and 'healthier' themes following the effortful completion of his Grand Guignol opera *The Fiery Angel*, can now be ascribed to atheism. Indeed, this is explicitly repudiated. What we can't know is how important the nostrums of the faith remained for the rest of Prokofiev's life when his work became simpler, grander and yet more melodic. He might just have been trying to make his mark with music that sounded maximally unlike Stravinsky's!

The diaries don't provide a continuous

'Prokofiev's human side is perhaps most fully engaged when he strives to defend a nest full of young birds from a marauding cat'

narrative. The lacuna at the end of Vol 2 means that there's nothing on Lina Codina's pregnancy and the pair's subsequent marriage. By the close of Vol 3, in which dramatico-musical works loom larger than the abstract pieces, Prokofiev is using his journal to document increasingly frequent Russian trips rather than giving us a day-to-day record of his home life. There is no clinching final statement. A man who by 1927 was well aware that 'All kinds of people are in gaol, both criminals and political prisoners...' would have understood that the USSR was not the best place to commit inner reflections to paper. No material from the sketchier Soviet-era notebooks is appended. Instead Phillips tops and tails the tome with the reminiscences of a confidant, Serge Moreux, as published in *Tempo* as long ago as 1949 – 'Yes, my friend, I'm going back'. More gratuitous perhaps is the passage from Mark Twain's withering denunciation of Christian Science.

Before it peters out, the diary itself records a Moscow concert of May 25, 1933, at which the Leader and Teacher himself was present. 'I did not want to peer too obviously, but at the end of the interval Ptashka (Prokofiev's pet name for his first wife) glanced into the Government box and locked eyes with Stalin, who was just at that moment coming into it. Of such intensity was his gaze that she immediately turned away.' Like so many members of the intelligentsia, she would later spend years in the Gulag.

Faber's elegant production takes in 39 well-chosen if modestly sized plates and there is a detailed index. **David Gutman**

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of reissues and archive recordings

Beethoven in Stuttgart and Spain

The Carl Schuricht collection continues; an appreciation of Ataúlfo Argenta

Putting your finger on the precise quality that makes **Carl Schuricht's** conducting so appealing can be difficult. Heard superficially, Schuricht's legacy with the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra suggests neither more nor less than good, honest musicianship conveyed with obvious dedication by a seasoned but fallible orchestra (occasional tuning problems impinge) in reasonable mono sound. But is that enough to justify purchasing the second volume of Hänssler's 'Carl Schuricht Collection'? It wouldn't be if 'honest musicianship' was indeed all there was to it. But more often than not there's something extra, a leaping spontaneity that on occasion transcends the orchestra's limitations and really grabs you.

No doubt about it, Schuricht's rugged but largely unobtrusive individuality has a way of winning you over, as in his vital but

'Schuricht's rugged individuality has a way of winning you over'

flexible handling of the *Scherzo* and finale of Beethoven's Fifth, similar in concept to his Paris recording recently reissued by EMI (1/13) but more urgently projected, most notably in the *Scherzo's* dramatic *fugato*, which yields greater reserves of power in Stuttgart. Some of the differences between the Beethoven performances are comparatively subtle. In the two *Pastorals*, for example, where, near the start of 'Scene by the Brook', the Stuttgart version weaves the principal violin theme with a degree of extra warmth.

Both Brahms's Fourth and Schumann's Third are less 'in your face' than their stereo counterparts (available as part of Scribendum's Schuricht concert hall set: SC011) and the highlight of Brahms's Third is its dramatically charged finale. The orchestra is perhaps at its least impressive in Debussy's *La mer*, where shortcomings in execution can be distracting, but Reger's *Hiller Variations* and Liszt's *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne* are better played and benefit from the energy, intelligence and exuberance of Schuricht's conducting.

Tchaikovsky's *Hamlet* is thrillingly done and the rarities include Blacher's upbeat *Concertante Musik*, Günter Raphael's mildly interesting *Sinfonia breve* and a rather less memorable Violin Concerto by Robert Oboussier.

Rehearsal sequences for Brahms's Second and music from Wagner's *Parsifal* (the actual performances, or ones fairly close to them in provenance, are included in Vol 1) are the only stereo items in the set, and are revealing in that you can hear Schuricht's quiet but firmly focused methods in action, an approach that informs everything in a set which also includes Beethoven's First, Third and Fourth symphonies, Brahms's First, Strauss's *Sinfonia domestica* (a particularly enjoyable performance) and various shorter works. The transfers are basically pretty acceptable; I only wish that the filtering process had been used with a little less zeal.

ICA's tribute to the fine Spanish conductor **Ataúlfo Argenta** sounds rather better. Some years ago while in Barcelona I acquired a four-disc set on the Radiotelevisión Española label (7/99) devoted to mostly live Argenta performances, including (I'm pretty certain)

two that are included here, the *Eroica* with the National Radio Orchestra of Spain and Smetana's *Bartered Bride* Overture with the Suisse Romande Orchestra.

I say 'pretty sure' in the case of the *Eroica* because the usual 'coughs and squeaks test' that one makes between recordings to check if they are in fact the same proved, in this case, rather inconclusive (the Spanish set includes no dates). Still, even if they're not the same – which I doubt – the performances are virtually identical, typical of the best conductors of the period (van Beinum, Boult, Schuricht) in that although there are no significant mannerisms, the overall impression is of a strong musical personality who's very much in charge. It's a powerful yet flexible reading, well played.

The Smetana is taken at quite a lick, while the makeweights fondly reminded me of that same Spanish trip and what seemed like an endless stream of zarzuela CD releases under Argenta's direction that has never seen the light of day beyond the Spanish market. I'm sure this happy variation on the operetta genre would find a welcome local market and the assorted preludes and intermezzos by Chapí and Giménez included here fall very happily on the ear.

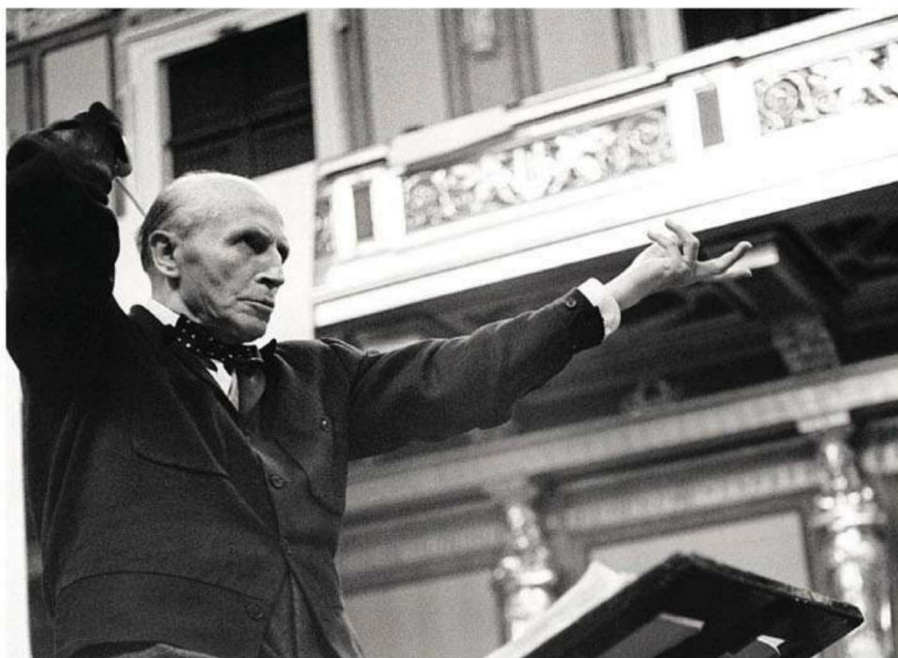
THE RECORDINGS



Carl Schuricht Collection, Vol 2
Hänssler Classic ② ⑩ CD93 292



Ataúlfo Argenta conducts Beethoven and Smetana
ICA ② ICAC5087



Carl Schuricht: leaping spontaneity

Glorious John on a roll

This latest addition to the Barbirolli Society catalogue stopped me in my tracks. We know from an Orfeo disc featuring the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (C265 921B) how urgently **Sir John Barbirolli** could connect with the drama and ethereal wastelands of Vaughan Williams's Sixth Symphony and I had often wondered how he might tackle what is at times the even more harrowing world of the Fourth. As it happens, a taped performance with the BBC Symphony Orchestra from 1950 survives and relates a performance that is positively gruelling in its intensity.

The composer himself recorded the work (pre-war) with the same orchestra to magnificent effect (Naxos 8 111048), but Barbirolli's significantly broader account, although no less striking, leaves an entirely different impression – the very opening, for example, and the dark, heavily weighted return of the same motif that brings the work to its devastating conclusion. I was reminded of Koussevitzky's way with new symphonic music, so compelling is Barbirolli's handling of the Fourth. It also serves to prove that Barbirolli's occasional preference for slower tempi was by no means restricted to his old age.

The coupling is hardly less gripping, a large-scale symphony by a composer best known for a breezy encore of less than two minutes' duration. Arthur Benjamin's highly inventive 1945 Symphony combines searing passion, depth of feeling and Waltonian exuberance, and Barbirolli's 1948 premiere performance (with the Hallé Orchestra this time) gives the work its best possible shot.

With generally excellent transfers, this is an indispensable addition to the Barbirolli discography and I strongly recommend it.

THE RECORDING



Vaughan Williams Sym No 4, etc
BBC SO; Hallé Orch / Barbirolli
Barbirolli Society Ⓜ Ⓢ JSB1064

The great collaborator

Violinist **Szymon Goldberg** was the perfect chamber musician. His quiet, veiled tone was vibrant but unobtrusive, his willingness to give way when others needed to assert their musical personalities an invaluable asset.

Pianist Lili Kraus was for years a mainstay among Goldberg's distinguished collaborators. Her superb playing in various violin sonatas by Beethoven and Mozart set standards that have not been matched since the 1930s, when these wonderful recordings were made. Kraus's brilliance and Goldberg's tempered expressivity make for a perfect match, and when joined by the cellist Anthony Pini in a pair of Haydn Piano Trios (Nos 27 and 29), the results are just as impressive. Then there are the string trio recordings with Paul Hindemith (viola) and Emanuel Feuermann (cello), especially Beethoven's delightful Op 8, where Feuermann's cello underpins the musical line with tonal warmth and lustre.

Concertos are represented by a pre-war sequence of *Brandenburg Concertos* (Nos 1, 2 and 4) with members of the Berlin Philharmonic, interesting performances though not a patch on Goldberg's later stereo

set with the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra. But the concertos with the Philharmonia under Walter Susskind are among Goldberg's finest solo recordings, the Bach A minor and E major distinctive above all for the great beauty of their slow movements. The transfers are admirably smooth.

THE RECORDING



Szymon Goldberg, Vol 2:
Commercial Recordings 1932-51
Music & Arts Ⓜ Ⓢ CD1225

Richter plays Beethoven

Goldberg's art was couched in terms of a reluctance to overstate the musical case but turn to **Sviatoslav Richter**, and the common ground with Goldberg isn't so much understatement as a flat refusal to indulge anything resembling vulgarity. A new ICA CD recalls an all-Beethoven solo recital that Richter gave at London's Royal Festival Hall in June 1975.

The repertoire centrepiece is the *Hammerklavier* Sonata, the initial impression strong, dry and uncompromising, even a little bloodless. Richter doesn't hurry the *Scherzo*, whereas the *Adagio sostenuto* is an unpeopled nocturnal landscape under a winter night's sky, its various sections drawn together with cool consistency and profound understanding, of a kind. The finale's fugal forays are thrown off with brittle nonchalance and you reach the summit awestruck but longing for just a touch of warmth.

Interesting as this is, it isn't actually the highlight of the disc, at least not in my view. That distinction goes to the early C major Sonata, Op 2 No 3, where more than almost anyone else Richter makes the haunting *Adagio* sound like a vivid premonition of the late, great slow movements. Play just the opening couple of minutes and note how the music breathes, the perfect placing and pacing of the notes, while the dark Schubertian second idea (which here sounds more than ever like a premonition of Schubert's *Unfinished*) wears a deathly pallor. This is Richter at his most imposing, withdrawn and austere but also magnetic and passionately engaging. And if you want your furrowed brow to ease for a moment or two, listen to how Richter lunges headlong at the fourth of the Op 126 Bagatelles. No prisoners taken here: they'd all run off beforehand! Ⓢ

THE RECORDING



Beethoven Piano Sonatas Nos 3 & 29
Sviatoslav Richter pf
ICA Ⓢ ICAC5084

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

The early Requiem

In this month's Specialist's Guide, **Fabrice Fitch** delves as far back as the 15th century to explore the flowering of polyphony inspired by the Roman Catholic Mass for the Dead

It isn't known who wrote the first Requiem (also known as the Mass for the Dead), or for what occasion. The earliest surviving setting is Ockeghem's, but his elder contemporary Dufay also composed one, which is now lost, directing in his will that it be sung at his own commemoration, which took place in 1474.

In any case, the idea of composing polyphony for this part of the Catholic liturgy was late in taking off, possibly because the festive associations of polyphony were deemed inappropriate in a funereal context. For this reason, perhaps, the earliest settings stick very closely to the plainchant, which is usually very audible in the top voice and accompanied by simple part-writing. That explains the strong family resemblance between the settings from the start, but doesn't exclude some wonderfully detailed music in the more expansive sections, most notably the Offertory, whose vivid imagery often elicits startling musical responses. The Catholic Church's adoption of the Roman rite in the mid-16th century standardised the usage of the texts we know today, but even as late as Lassus, references to the genre's earliest settings are clearly discernible.

My selection is reverse chronological, and, of course, not exhaustive: I've aimed for as great a variety of ensembles, and quality of interpretations, as possible. Although it's not technically a Requiem, I have included Schütz's *Musicalische Exequien*, partly to represent the Protestant tradition, and also because this work seems uniquely poised between polyphonic past and a more rhetorically appellative future. For most selections I've mentioned an alternative recording that's worth investigating. This reflects the number of fine recordings that have appeared recently (I've reviewed about a dozen in the last year): an optimistic note on which to conclude. **G**



Johannes Ockeghem (second from right, wearing a hooded cloak) at the lectern: engraving from 1537



10 Schütz

Dresden Chamber Choir /
Hans-Christoph Rademann
Carus (C) CARUS83 238

The *Musicalische Exequien* (not a Requiem as such) is a carefully judged interweaving of the biblical texts specified by the nobleman for whose funeral rites it was written. Demonstrating Schütz's commitment to the polyphonic style, it is one of his supreme achievements. Vox Luminis's Gramophone Award-winning account (Ricercar, A/11) has been rightly praised, but my personal preference among recent accounts is for this one, released a little later; dare I say it, it has a bit more life about it.



9 Victoria

Gabrieli Consort /
Paul McCreesh
Archiv (M) 447 095-2AH (12/95)
Tomás Luis de Victoria published

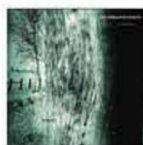
two Requiems. This six-voice *Officium defunctorum*, composed in 1603 for the obsequies of the Dowager Empress Maria, is one of the best-loved works of the entire Renaissance. Paul McCreesh gives it the full liturgical reconstruction treatment, complete with the wonderful *bajón* (basically an early bassoon) doubling the bass, which grounds the singers wonderfully. Among many other recordings, Philippe Herreweghe's is also worth hearing (PHI, 11/12).



8 Du Caurroy

Choir of New College, Oxford /
Edward Higginbottom
Brilliant Classics (S) (S) 92433
Tradition has it that this setting

(*Missa pro defunctis*), probably composed around 1600, was used at the obsequies of French kings well into the following century. Part of an *cappella* recital that also includes a selection of the composer's motets, this interpretation makes the most of the reedy treble sound that is New College's signature. Also worth hearing is Ensemble Douce Mémoire's recording (Naïve E8922), which, like their Févin disc, combines voices and instruments.



7 Lassus

Hilliard Ensemble
ECM (P) 453 841-2 (9/98)
The prolific Lassus composed two Requiems, one for four

voices and the other for five. The Hilliard Ensemble's recording of this four-voice *Missa pro defunctis* is perhaps the finer. It has the hallmarks of Lassus's late style: sober (not to say severe) and pared down. But far from being off-putting, this restraint evokes all sorts of sentiments, from awe and intense, private grief, to consolation and the promise of redemption. That's not bad for just four voices; and the Hilliard Ensemble's voices aren't bad, either.



6 Vaet

Dufay Ensemble /
Eckehard Kiem
Ars Musici (M) AM13362 (6/03)
This counts as my wild card. Unfairly

underrated today, the short-lived Jacobus Vaet was briefly Kapellmeister of the imperial court at Vienna in the mid-16th century, and his compact setting of the *Missa pro defunctis* (which – like Richafort's – incorporates references to other polyphony along with the plainchant) is very affecting. Although perhaps not as polished technically as the other recordings in this selection, the Dufay Ensemble's interpretation still effectively conveys this unassuming work.



5 Richafort

Huelgas Ensemble /
Paul Van Nevel
Harmonia Mundi
(B) HMA195 1730 (10/02^{re})

Jean Richafort's is an expansive, six-voice affair, perhaps intended to commemorate Josquin Desprez (d1521). My choice is a bit naughty, for Paul Van Nevel's old trick of doubling the voice parts skews the counterpoint quite maddeningly (it's not just the purists who'll prefer the more recent reading from Cinqucento – Hyperion, A/12 – which plays it straighter). Van Nevel's sense of pacing and the Huelgas's luscious sonority are near immaculate.



4 Févin

Ensemble Douce Mémoire /
Denis Raisin Dadre
Zig-Zag Territoires (P) ZZT110501
Acoustically, this *Missa pro*

fidelibus defunctis is one of the most sumptuous recordings of this round-up. Denis Raisin Dadre's ensemble combines voices and instruments to recreate the funeral rites for Anne of Brittany, queen consort to two successive French kings, in 1514. Although there's no proof that the work was actually composed for this occasion, Anne had one of the best-staffed chapels in Europe, and music meant enough to her to justify such a splendid send-off.



3 Divitis

Ensemble Organum /
Marcel Pérès
Aeon (P) AECD1216 (9/12)
There's a twist to this one: the same

Requiem is attributed in different sources to French Antoine de Févin (see No 4) and South Netherlandish Antonius Divitis. Organum director Pérès prefers the latter identification, but his performance is utterly different from Douce Mémoire's, and in its own way it's equally compelling. Here the plainsong (thrillingly rendered) is on a par with the polyphony, just as it would have been in any Requiem Mass – the latter always conceived as an adornment of the former.



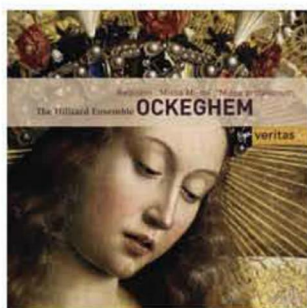
2 La Rue. Ockeghem

Cappella Pratensis / Stratton Bull
Challenge Classics (P) CC72541 (7/12)

I was a touch dismissive of this reading of La Rue's *Missa pro fidelibus defunctis* when it appeared last year (the Ensemble Clément Janequin's fine interpretation, now 25 years old, casts a long shadow – Harmonia Mundi, 7/89). But greater familiarity convinces me of the newcomer's qualities, and the interpretation of the Ockeghem is a worthy successor to the Hilliard's. One hears La Rue's debt to the older composer, but his own brand of brooding sonority adds something equally distinctive.

1 Ockeghem

Hilliard Ensemble Virgin Veritas (S) (2) 628492-2 (10/85^{re}; 2/89^{re})



The big daddy of all Requiems already encompasses the full range of the genre's expressive possibilities, from the stark simplicity of the opening movements to the Offertory, one of Ockeghem's more complex creations. It's an odd piece in some ways (and almost certainly incomplete as it comes down to us), but as the earliest of a particularly long-lived genre it boasts a healthy discography. The Hilliard Ensemble are on great form here, the extended duos of the Gradual and Tract being particularly moving. Ensemble Organum have recorded a distinctive alternative (Harmonia Mundi, 2/94), with high tenors on the top line.



Visit the Gramophone Player at gramophone.co.uk to sample an excerpt from Ockeghem's Requiem performed by the Hilliard Ensemble

ARE YOU A SPECIALIST?

Share your favourite recordings of early Requiem Masses on the forum at gramophone.co.uk, where you can also suggest stand-out recordings of music composed by **Karl Amadeus Hartmann**, the subject of next month's specialist, Philip Clark.





Composer-pianist: Saint-Saëns, here performing in Paris in 1913 under Pierre Monteux, recorded part of his own Second Piano Concerto in 1904

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Airy and sure-footed

Saint-Saëns's Second Piano Concerto may seem little more than a shallow showpiece, but there's a lot at stake for the soloist, as **Jeremy Nicholas** discovers via myriad recordings

This concerto was famously caricatured by pianist Sigismund Stojowski as 'beginning like Bach and ending like Offenbach'. It has three movements – the solemn 'Bach' first movement (marked *Andante sostenuto*), a *scherzo* in Mendelssohnian spirit but with sonata-form structure, and a concluding 'Offenbach' tarantella (*Presto*) – and was written in the space of 17 days during spring 1868. The impetus for its composition was Saint-Saëns's friend and frequent piano duet partner Anton Rubinstein. The Russian was visiting Paris and remarked that he'd never conducted an orchestra in the French capital and suggested putting on a concert. Saint-Saëns thought this a splendid idea and, having ascertained that the next available date at the Salle Pleyel was in three weeks' time, undertook to write a concerto for the occasion.

He had been toying with such a project for some time, his First Piano Concerto having been written a decade earlier. While he was in the throes of composition, his pupil Gabriel Fauré showed him the score of a *Tantum ergo* he'd written as an exercise at the Ecole Niedermeyer. Saint-Saëns, so the story goes, gave it an approving glance, put the score in his pocket and said: 'Give it to me. I can do

something with that!' It became the tranquil theme that arrives after the first orchestral *tutti*.

The first performance with the composer as soloist and Rubinstein conducting was on May 13, 1868. Saint-Saëns wrote: 'Not having had the time to practise it sufficiently for performance I played very badly, and except for the *scherzo*, which was an immediate success, it did not go well. The general opinion was that the first part lacked coherence and the finale was a complete failure.' Since then it has been one of Saint-Saëns's most popular and frequently played works, and has been almost as frequently sniffed at by the higher-minded critics who view it as a shallow virtuoso showpiece. 'Those who criticize Saint-Saëns for his frivolity,' wrote the composer's biographer James Harding, 'should try one day to write music as airy and sure-footed as this. They would not find it easy.'

THE COMPOSER'S STAMP

The concerto is unusual, but by no means unique, in opening with the solo piano (Beethoven's Fourth and Rachmaninov's Second are, perhaps, the two other best-known examples), which plays an unbarred, toccata-like passage reminiscent of

a Bach fantasy. In 1904, **Saint-Saëns** himself made a solo recording of the first movement – or rather a kind of pot-pourri of its themes, reducing about 10'30" of music to 3'47" by cutting from the end of letter A in the score to halfway through the cadenza and thence to the end (with further cuts). It's interesting that the tempo that Saint-Saëns adopts for his initial *Andante sostenuto* is faster than any subsequent recording of this passage. That's not to say it doesn't work musically – but did he always intend it to be played at this speed? If so, only one pianist, Howard Shelley, comes close to emulating him. Significantly, none of the few who studied the work with Saint-Saëns and subsequently recorded the concerto did.

Such a one was **Jeanne-Marie Darré** (1905-99), who was guided in her interpretations of all five of Saint-Saëns's piano concertos by the composer himself. Indeed, her career was launched when, in May 1926, she played them all in a single concert with the Lamoureux Orchestra conducted by Paul Paray. It was Paray (with the Orchestre Colonne) who conducted Darré, playing a Gaveau piano, in her first recording of the G minor Concerto in February 1948. The six Pathé sides (all first takes) are on Cascavelle VEL3066 with

a good deal of surface swish but a finely judged balance between soloist and orchestra. In Darré's playing, it seems to me, we hear the essence of the French style marked by sparkling clarity and finger independence, a light, lucid tone and an inner vitality – to which you can add Darré's *joie de vivre*. These are qualities that this particular concerto requires from the soloist in spades.

The Darré-Paray recording is superb in every respect except, of course, for those whose ears can't get past the sound of shellac. On balance, I marginally prefer Darré's second (1955) version with the French National Radio Orchestra conducted by Louis Fourester, with whom she recorded the other four Saint-Saëns concertos; this set, in the opinion of many, still contains the best version of each of the five. By then, Darré had been playing the G minor Concerto for well over 30 years, and her youthful, freshly minted performance is notable for its scrupulous attention to detail such as – a tiny point – in the introductory solo passage when the left hand crosses over the right hand to play three high octave Ds: Saint-Saëns clearly marks these to be arpeggiated; Darré is one of the few audibly to do so. There is a bottom E natural on the piano which is not equally voiced with its neighbours, and the woodwind reeds are unusually nasal, but these minor defects in no way detract from the unquenchable spirit behind the endeavour.

The Belgian **Arthur De Greef** (1862-1940) worked with Saint-Saëns around 1879 following his studies with Liszt. The G minor Concerto was one of his specialties. He recorded it twice, once in 1921 and again, this time electrically, in 1928 with the New Symphony Orchestra under Sir Landon Ronald. It is a remarkable document, as sonically it compares favourably with Darré over a quarter of a century later. The woodwind and brass have a more polished sound (in the 'chorale' section of the last movement, for instance) and the piano tone is rich and full. De Greef plays with a great deal more weight than Darré, makes a few minor changes to the text (omitting or adding

arpeggiation, ending the occasional phrase with an unmarked *sforzando*) and, in common with many others, adopts a slower tempo for the galumphing 'waltz' second subject of the second movement. (As Stephen Hough once said to me, 'It doesn't suddenly become a farmer's boot. It's still got the buckle on the pump.') The horns make late entries at 0'52" in the same movement, and Pearl (not helped by De Greef) offers an unconvincing side join at 2'19". The finale sounds just a little tired – like a man in his late sixties on a long cross country run gamely heading for the finish and a nice hot shower.

A WOMAN'S TOUCH

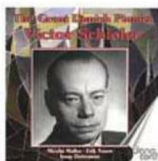
Incidentally, the earliest recording of any part of the concerto I have come across, apart from the composer's, is Landon Ronald conducting the 27-year-old **Irene Scharrer** in 1915 in an abridged performance of the *Allegro scherzando*. Another great British female pianist for whom this concerto became something of a signature piece was **Moura Lympamy**. She too was 27 when she played the work at the First Night of the Proms in June 1943, conducted by Sir Henry Wood. Sadly, only the first and third movements have survived in playable condition, and though this is a treasurable document in decent-enough live period sound, I find it, along with Lympamy's two studio recordings, disappointingly matter-of-fact and lacking in character. That 'waltz' section, for instance: there may not be any change of tempo indicated, but there should surely be a punctuation mark, a more laid-back pulse for the idea to have its full effect; but Lympamy just sails through from one episode to another. Her 1945 Decca account with Warwick Braithwaite is less desirable than her 1951 revisit with Jean Martinon on the same label but in far better sound. Both of them are available on hard-to-find CDs.

What a difference listening to the forgotten Danish pianist **Victor Schiøler** (1899-1967) in 1953. In fact, this is one of the most

consistently successful of all recordings of this concerto. Schiøler shapes the music with the practised ease of a master story-teller: it's judiciously paced, with exemplary textual clarity and light pedalling with a ravishing *leggiere* touch. The piano is placed forward: it's always good to hear every note of the piano in a piano concerto. Schiøler equals and often surpasses Darré. The orchestra under Nikolai Malko is a notch up. Hearing straight afterwards **Benno Moiseiwitsch** and Basil Cameron in 1947, one acknowledges the same heart-easing spirit behind the performance but not, surprisingly, the accuracy. Listening to these venerable and once-popular plum label 78s is like putting on an old cardy with a few holes and stains: you're fond of it, you'll never part with it but you know there are smarter and better ones available.

RUBINSTEIN'S RENDERINGS

Arthur Rubinstein, born just three years before Moiseiwitsch in 1887, had this concerto in his repertoire from the 1890s onwards. Saint-Saëns heard him play it in Paris in 1904. His three studio recordings are clearly important, but Rubinstein was not happy with the earliest, made in 1939, and refused its release. It wasn't until 1998 that it saw the light of day. Bad woodwind intonation, slack ensemble, a tired, episodic *scherzo*, and a soloist who sounds out of sorts put it *bors de combat*. A live Carnegie Hall performance with Dimitri Mitropoulos in 1953 is on a completely different level. At 66, Rubinstein plays like a youngster. He's on fire, and the New York Phil is keen not to be outdone. You can hear the audience's collective smile at the end of the second movement. The finale is as exciting as any. I'd put this performance just ahead (but only just) of the one he gave in 1957 at the Royal Festival Hall with Rudolf Schwarz, only because in the latter he briefly comes off the rails in the tarantella's trills during a finale that at 5'43" is one of the fastest of any discussed here.



BEST HISTORICAL

Danacord (M) ② DACOCD491/2

Schiøler, Danish St Rad SO / Malko

If you wonder if a pianist you've never heard of can outclass the likes of Lympamy and Moiseiwitsch in this work, then you must sample Victor Schiøler's playing.



BEST 'TINGLE FACTOR'

EMI (B) ② 569470-2

Darré, French Nat Rad Orch / Fourester

Were this disc still available, it would have just squeezed in as my top choice. This isn't a perfect rendition but who cares when wit and élan are on offer in such abundance?



BEST LIVE PERFORMANCE

Guild (B) GHCD2355

Rubinstein, New York PO / Mitropoulos

The studio recordings with Wallenstein and Ormandy may be revered, but hear the difference when this great artist plays in front of a full house at Carnegie Hall.

There is little to choose between Rubinstein's revered 1958 recording with Alfred Wallenstein and the no less exemplary account with Eugene Ormandy in 1969. Tempi in all three movements are roughly similar. Both suffer from the same dry acoustic. Neither of them has the same electrifying impact as the Mitropoulos; nor has the performance with André Previn filmed in 1975 when Rubinstein was 88 and nearly blind, recorded (without an audience) in the Fairfield Halls, Croydon. The first movement is a full three minutes longer than under Wallenstein. No one looks as though they're enjoying themselves much and it permeates the music-making. Interestingly, Rubinstein, interviewed at the age of 90 on the same DVD, claimed that his friend Ravel told him that he (Ravel) learnt all his secrets of orchestration from studying Saint-Saëns's Second Piano Concerto.

Two other DVDs of the concerto are worth considering, though both have their drawbacks. **Yefim Bronfman**, with the Rolls-Royce accompaniment of the Berlin Philharmonic and the stolid Kurt Sanderling on the podium, makes the first movement sound like Brahms; its over-ponderous declamations seem to come from a different concerto from the sparkling *scherzo* and tarantella. Saint-Saëns, one feels, is not quite Sanderling's *tasse de thé*. It's a live 1992 concert, well filmed and in excellent sound. The great **Nelson Freire** is not as lucky with his film director in another live performance (1983) from Lugano, Switzerland. The orchestra, though perfectly adequate and directed with a great deal more enthusiasm by David Shallon, is not the Berlin Phil. Against these shortcomings is Freire's superb, stylistically attuned execution of the solo part. You don't even need the sound on: simply watching his hands silently and effortlessly dancing over the keyboard gives almost as much pleasure as hearing him play.

Earl Wild is another whose delight in the sheer exuberance of his own keyboard athleticism perfectly matches Saint-Saëns's requirements. In his recording, made at Walthamstow Town Hall in 1967 under Massimo Freccia with the RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra (which I think was the Royal Philharmonic moonlighting), the *scherzo* is witty, while the finale, more elegant than speedy, builds to a thrilling close. Made for Reader's Digest with a magic touch by producer Charles Gerhardt, it's now on Chesky.

Howard Shelley, conducting from the piano, takes a similar approach (superbly recorded) – except in the first movement, which is a good 90 seconds fleeter than Wild and some of his more heavy-handed rivals. Personally, I find his approach invigorating and thoroughly convincing. If only the finale had that extra zing.

Malcolm Binns's 1968 version with the LPO and Sir Alexander Gibson made for



Caricature of Saint-Saëns by his student Fauré, whose *Tantum ergo* is used in the Second Concerto

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1904 Saint-Saëns (excs)	Naxos ④ 8 558107/10
1915 Scharrer; New SO / Ronald (2nd movt)	APR ⑥ ② APR6010 (11/12)
1928 De Greef; New SO / Ronald	Pearl ④ ② GEMMCD9974
1939 Rubinstein; Paris Cons Orch / Gaubert	Testament ⑥ SBT1154 (2/99)
1943 Lympny; LPO / Wood (1st & 3rd movts)	Somm ⑥ SOMMCD076
1945 Lympny; National SO / Braithwaite	Pristine ④ PASC058 (10/06)
1947 Moiseiwitsch; Philh Orch / Cameron	APR ④ APR5529; Naxos ④ 8 110683
1948 Darré; Orch Colonne / Paray	Cascavelle ⑥ ② VEL3066
1951 Lympny; LPO / Martinon	Decca ④ ⑨ 475 7209DC9
1953 Rubinstein; New York PO / Mitropoulos	Guild ⑥ GHCD2355
1953 Schiøler; Danish St Rad SO / Malko	Danacord ④ ② DACOCD491/2
1954 Gilels; Paris Cons Orch / Cluytens	Testament ⑥ SBT1029 (2/94); EMI ④ 345819-2; ④ ⑨ 629511-2
1955 Darré; French Nat Rad Orch / Fourrestier	EMI ④ ② 569470-2 (7/97 - nla)
1957 Rubinstein; BBC SO / R Schwarz	BBC Legends ⑥ BBCL4216-2 (11/07)
1958 Rubinstein; Sym of the Air / Wallenstein	RCA ④ ⑨ 09026 61496-2 (4/93)
1967 Wild; RCA Victor SO / Freccia	Chesky ④ CHESKY-CD50
1969 Rubinstein; Philadelphia Orch / Ormandy	RCA ④ ② 09026 63070-2 (10/86*)
1975 Rubinstein; LSO / Previn	DG ⑥ ② 073 4195GH
1976 Entremont; Toulouse Capitole Orch / Plasson	Newton Classics ④ ② 8802144 (5/90*)
1983 Freire; Svizzera Italiana Orch / Shallon	VAI ⑥ ② VALDVD4409
1986 Rogé; RPO / Dutoit	Decca ④ ② 443 8652DF2 (12/86*)
1988 Biret; Philh Orch / Loughran	Naxos ④ ② 8 550334 (12/90); ④ 8 553277
1988 Petrov (arr Bizet)	Olympia ⑥ MKM081
1992 Bronfman; BPO / K Sanderling	EuroArts ⑥ ② 205 7638 (12/10)
2000 Hough; CBSO / Oramo	Hyperion ⑥ ② CDA67331/2 (11/01)
2004 Malikova; Cologne Rad SO / T Sanderling	Audite ⑥ ② ④ AUDITE91 650
2007 Thibaudet; Suisse Romande Orch / Dutoit	Decca ④ ② 475 8764DH (12/07)
2008 Shelley; Op North Orch	Chandos ⑥ CHANI0509 (5/09)
2012 Grosvenor; RLPO / Judd	Decca ④ ② 478 3527DH (11/12)

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Ilya Repin's portrait of Anton Rubinstein, who conducted the first performance of the Second Concerto

World Record Club (T672) is, sadly, no longer available. (When is someone going to reissue Binns's recordings for this label?) Also not available, and only included in this survey out of documentary interest, is an Everest LP (X-911) of piano rolls made by Harold Bauer (1873-1951). Among these is the solo piano version of the Saint-Saëns produced by Bizet. As you would expect from a brilliant pianist, it's a highly ingenious and effective transcription – the second and third movements are a real virtuoso workout. The only other recording of the Bizet version was made in 1988 by the late **Nikolai Petrov** ('specially revised and amplified' by him). Prepare to be astounded.

LESS THAN PERFECT

Unfortunately, we shall have to say *au revoir* to **Idil Biret** conducted by James Loughran. The first movement is unexpectedly heavy-handed; for example, Biret plays *rallentando* the *accelerando*-marked octave/chord sequence before the first *tutti*. Adieu, too, to **Emil Gilels's** much-praised 1954 take with André Cluytens. A pity, because the *scherzo* and finale are scintillatingly light-fingered – among the very best, in fact; but the first movement seems to belong to another work, perhaps by Tchaikovsky, with Saint-Saëns's *agitato* request bizarrely translated by Gilels as 'laborious'.

Jean-Yves Thibaudet, despite the attentive support of Charles Dutoit and the Suisse Romande Orchestra, is uncharacteristically charmless in the second and third movements,

and fatally allows the tension to drop in the final pages. Yet the recorded sound earns this disc a top place, as does Thibaudet's magical handling of the end of the first movement. Dutoit, this time with the RPO, is **Pascal Rogé's** partner in the French pianist's traversal of all five concertos recorded in 1986. Here is another No 2 with a first movement that everyone is determined to make as doom-laden as possible. You can almost always tell who's opted for this approach by the way in which the final three crunching chords are played: Saint-Saëns was careful to write them as semiquavers, not as *tenuto* quaver beats, let alone crotchets (I'm sure the composer meant these final bars to be a mischievous test of Anton Rubinstein's conducting skills). In the succeeding movements, Rogé is efficient and proficient – but not special.

Philippe Entremont in his 1976 set of all five concertos with Michel Plasson makes a thrilling *accelerando* in the octave/chord sequence in the opening solo of the *Andante sostenuto*. Unfortunately, the piano is stationed quite a distance from the microphone and, especially in passages that are *forte* and above, sounds unpleasantly brittle. Despite a fluent technique, Entremont over-pedals at times and makes too much of the *scherzo's* 'waltz' theme. Vying for top place in terms of sound quality and recorded balance is **Anna Malikova's** recording of the five concertos with Thomas Sanderling and the Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra, whose part in proceedings is

beautifully captured (Mark Hohn the recording engineer) – even the three cymbal crashes in the finale, marked *p*, *mf* and *f*, are clearly graded. Malikova's No 2 is sturdy, accurate and workmanlike, but it doesn't excite.

Her tarantella is more an elegantly phrased *allegro vivace* than a scintillating *Presto* – which can't be said of **Stephen Hough's** finale, taken at a hair-raising speed and yet with more lucidly executed detail (in both piano and orchestra) than any other version, helped by Hyperion's characteristically contained acoustic. In fact, Hough is almost unique in having the grace to follow the composer's notations, dynamics and tempos to the letter throughout the whole concerto. If the final pages don't have quite the tingle factor of Darré, this is a bracingly confident, idiomatic performance.

And so, finally, to the latest recording of Saint-Saëns's Second Concerto, played by the youngest of all the above pianists. A casual listener ticks all the boxes. **Benjamin Grosvenor** has an innate understanding of what the work needs and clearly has the time of his life bringing it off. Does his playing have quite the same finesse and rhythmic security as the vastly more experienced Hough? No it doesn't, but it's nevertheless a very fine account that's knocked off a top spot with several 'that'll do' moments from the orchestra under conductor James Judd: some imprecise *pizzicatos* in the first movement (which ends with three staggered quaver beats), no *appoggiaturas* in the last two bars of the *scherzo*, and almost inaudible counterpoint from the lower strings at 4'14". Grosvenor's version, though, is worth having for his playing of the last movement alone – one of the most electrifying on disc, from the artfully accented first beats of the theme to his ecstatic delivery of the final page. **G**



TOP CHOICE

Hyperion (E) ② CDA67331/2

Hough: CBSO / Oramo

Stephen Hough's Award-winning set of all Saint-Saëns's works for piano and orchestra is a must for every collection and unlikely ever to be bettered. It includes the most consistently observed of all recordings of the Second Concerto.



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GRAMOPHONE DISC OF THE MONTH

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Britten: Cello Suites; Philip Higham Delphian DCD 34125 £12.99	Mussorgsky: Pictures/Prokofiev: Visions Fugitives/etc; Osborne Hyperion CDA 67896 £12.99
"Der Himmlische Leben" (Liszt/Mahler); Schwanewilms/Spencer ONYX 4103 £12.99	Saint-Saens/Tchaikovsky: Works for Cello and Orchestra; Tetreault Analekta An29881 £12.99
Faure: Piano Quintets; Quatuor Ebene/Le Sage Alpha 602 £12.99	Schubert: "Erlkönig" (Lieder Edition Vol 7); Goerne/Haefliger Harmonia Mundi HMC 902141 £13.99
Handel: Giulio Cesare; Lemieux/Gauvin/etc/Curtis Naive Op50536 (3 CDs) £24.99	Szymanowski: Symphonies 2 & 4/etc; BBCSO/Gardner Chandos CHSA 5115 (SACD) £12.99
Haydn: Symphonies 6-8; La Petite Bande/Kuijken Accent ACC24272 £12.99	DVD - "Schumann at Pier2" (Symphonies 1-4) C Major 711908 (3 DVDs) £24.99 (Also available on Blu-Ray, 712004, £29.99)

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Bach: English Suites; Richard Egarr (Harpsichord) Harmonia Mundi HMU 907591/92 (2 CDs) £19.99	Mozart: Piano Concertos 13 & 14/etc; Fialkowska Atma ACD 22532 £12.99
Bach: St John Passion; Bostridge/etc/Polyphony/OAE/Layton Hyperion CDA 67901/2 (2 CDs) £23.99	Nielsen: Symphonies 2 & 3; LSO/Davis LSO Live LSO 0722 (SACD) £8.99
Brahms: Piano Works Vol 2 (Sonata 3/etc); Barry Douglas Chandos CHAN 10757 £12.99	Parry/Stanford: Sacred Music; King's Consort & Choir/King VIVAT 101 £11.99
"British Clarinet Sonatas Vol 2" (Arnold/Horowitz/etc); Collins Chandos CHAN 10758 £12.99	Penderecki/Lutoslawski: String Quartets; Royal Quartet Hyperion CDA 67943 £12.99
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Glazunov/Schoeck: Violin Concertos; Chloe Hanslip Hyperion CDA 67940 £12.99	"Spheres" (Part/Jenkins/Einaudi/etc); Daniel Hope DG 479 0571 £12.99
Goossens: Orchestral Works Vol 2; Melbourne SO/Davis Chandos CHSA 5119 (SACD) £12.99	Vaughan Williams: Symphonies 5 & 8; Halle/Elder Halle CDHLL 7533 £12.99
William Hayes: 6 Cantatas/etc; Tubb/Rooley/etc Glossa GCD 922510 (2 CDs) £16.99	Verdi: The Complete Works (Various Artists) Decca 478 4916 (75 CDs!) £155.00
"In the Shadow of War" (Bloch/Bridge/Hough); Isserlis/etc BIS 1992 (SACD) £12.99	Vivaldi: Violin Concertos Vol 5 "Per Pisendel"; Sinkovsky Naive OP 30538 £12.99
Lutoslawski: Orchestral Works Vol 4 (Sym 1/etc); BBCSO/Gardner Chandos CHSA 5108 (SACD) £12.99	Wagner: Arias/Wesendock Lieder; Kaufmann/cond. Runnicles Decca 478 5189 £12.99
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Mahler: Symphony 2 (+ documentary); Hampson (narrator)/Jarvi VAIDVD 4560 £25.99	Verdi: La Forza del Destino; Urmana/Guelfi/etc/Mehta (Firenze 2007) Arthaus 107325 (2 DVDs) £29.99 (Also available on Blu-Ray, 108046, £29.99)
Pergolesi: L'Olimpiade; Gimenez/Petrova/de Marchi (2011) Arthaus 101650 (2 DVDs) £29.99 (Also available on Blu-Ray, 108064, £29.99)	Victor Herbert: Babes in Toyland (2 versions); Cook/Sullivan (1954/55) VAIDVD 4557 £19.99

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MUSICAL JOURNEYS

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A violinist's pilgrimage

Hannah Nepil samples the acoustics of the auditorium at the inauguration of Cremona's new violin museum



Testing the acoustic: Antonio De Lorenzi

For any semi-keen violinist, a visit to Cremona may feel like a pilgrimage, or, at least, something to Tweet about to string players in the know. And that's not just because it was here that Giuseppe Guarneri, Andrea Amati and a certain Stradivari all established themselves, along with the many other luthiers for which the sleepy northern Italian city is acclaimed. Walking along Cremona's main streets, I notice countless pictures of violins adorning shop windows. At my hotel, the receptionist circles the Stradivari house, tombstone and museum on the map before telling me my room number. This is a city devoted to keeping its musical heritage alive.

This may explain why the inauguration of a new violin museum and auditorium, which I have come to witness, is such cause for pomp and circumstance. Based in the recently renovated Palazzo dell'Arte, the Museo del Violino documents five centuries of violin making in Cremona. It houses 10 Stradivarius violins, previously scattered around the city, under one roof, as well as instruments by Amati, Guarneri, Rugeri and others. A separate area of the museum pays homage to contemporary Cremonese violin crafters, of which there are still approximately 150.

My main reason for being here, however, is to see the new auditorium. The product of the architects Giorgio Palù and Michele Bianchi and the Japanese acoustics engineer Yasuhisa Toyota, this 450-seat structure has been built to both celebrate and modernise the Cremonese musical tradition. And it's one of the most attractive chamber music venues I've ever seen, boasting a quirky, fluid design of maple wood with audience seating arranged in the round. It has been born out of a former gym and dancehall, after some moderately intrusive surgery. 'I was disappointed with the building,' explains Toyota, 'but it was almost impossible to change the original structure. In the end we had to dig downwards

to improve the acoustics.' The result, he says, is a success.

'But "good acoustics" doesn't necessarily mean "good for every musician",' he insists. 'The thing about this hall is that it will give us a very clear sound. So if the quality of the instrument and musician is high, then the acoustics will enhance that. If it is not high, then everything will be exposed.'

All of which, one might expect, would make this the perfect place to sample the tonal clarity and power of a Stradivarius violin.

'The concert hall is constantly competing with CDs, DVDs, even iTunes'

- Yasuhisa Toyota, acoustician

So I'm feeling curious as Italian violinist Antonio De Lorenzi steps up to deliver a show-and-tell demonstration with the help of 'Vesuvius', a 1727 Strad. Toyota's description holds true: every note of the Sarabande from Bach's Partita No 2 and the first movement of the Mozart A major concerto, K219, that Antonio plays carries with laser-like definition. But so do the lumps and bumps, of which there are a few, owing (partly) to the oddness of the occasion: it's hard to deliver a pristine rendition of Mozart while constantly stopping to praise the acoustics. What is more distracting, however, is the circular seating arrangement. Performers here must have a tough time deciding who gets to see their face and who their posterior.

Proximity to the audience, De Lorenzi later explains, is a greater consideration. 'For me it's not a problem to have the audience so near and on the same level as me,' he says, 'but I don't know if other musicians like to look up and see people so close by, perhaps coughing or moving about.' That very sense of intimacy, however, is exactly what Toyota was after: 'Thirty or 40 years ago the quality of recorded sound was very poor,' he says. 'But now it's so high that the concert hall is constantly competing with CDs, DVDs, even iTunes. So we need to offer something special to attract an audience. What this venue provides is not only a space for concerts but also one for social activity, where we can gather together and communicate.'

The path to recovery

Andrew Mellor travels to Copenhagen to find out how the the Royal Danish Opera is faring after last year's upheavals

When Keith Warner and Jakub Hruša resigned from their positions at the Royal Danish Opera on a single day in January 2012, *Gramophone* was on hand to cover the ensuing crisis and was even invited to comment in *Politiken* – Denmark's prestigious daily broadsheet. Budget cuts, accusations of mismanagement and a scandal involving drug-taking at the sister ballet company formed the context of the resignations, all of which angered the Danish government, used to bestowing generous resources on its arts organisations with the proviso that they counter artistic flair with businesslike efficiency and sheen.

La Serenissima

CADOGAN HALL

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Thursday 14 March, 7.30pm



with Sally Bruce-Payne, mezzo-soprano

The award-winning Baroque ensemble, leading exponents of Vivaldi's music, explores two periods of composition from the composer's life, 1717 and 1733, featuring entr'acte violin concertos, and arias from several of the composer's operas.

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Book online: www.cadoganhall.com

Our point was this: Copenhagen's *Gramophone* Award-winning opera company could squander its biggest assets in panic and sink into anonymous mediocrity; or it could protect its unique ensemble structure and home, up its marketing game and focus on cutting costs in the right places to ensure that, one day, it might be great again.

In a sense, it has done precisely those things. In post now are music director Michael Boder, whom I saw conduct a scintillating *Die Frau ohne Schatten* in March 2012; and artistic director Sven Müller, who worked as 'number two' to both Warner and Kasper Holten. Promoting Müller was an astute move: he is close to the ensemble and the orchestra, and proved an adept diplomat in getting Warner to return and complete his *Parsifal* (and persuading the Royal Theatre's management to let him back into the building). 'We had a

'Technical effects can have huge operatic power if they're controlled by the score'

hard time going through the cutbacks, but we are moving forward – the atmosphere is improving,' Müller tells me. He is cautious ambition and focused pragmatism personified. Production numbers per season are down from 12 to eight (though that will increase), but during the January weekend that I was in town you could see three different new productions on three consecutive days.

One was Rossini's *Semiramide* directed by Nigel Lowery. The opera is a corker: clipped 'Classical' Rossini in the *Ermione* mould, with the alluring scent of *Nabucco*'s Semitism. But Lowery's ugly production didn't work. One unfortunate effect was directing the chorus to appear as uniformly miserable as they might have been when they heard they were losing 16 of their number a year ago. And despite Henriette Bonde-Hansen's striking vocal and dramatic finesse in the title-role,

The insider's guide

Gramophone selects March's unmissable musical events

1 Seoul, Arts Center

Bernard Haitink conducts the LSO in Beethoven's Second Piano Concerto with soloist Maria João Pires, and Bruckner's Symphony No 9 as part of the orchestra's tour of Korea and Japan, which runs from February 28 until March 10. sac.or.kr/eng

2 Sheffield, Crucible Studio Theatre

Ensemble 360 perform Mozart's Quartet for Flute and Strings, K298; String Quartet, K421; Adagio for Cor Anglais and Strings, K580a; and Piano Quartet, K493, as part of an 'Exploring Mozart' weekend, running from March 1 to 3. musicintheround.co.uk

6 Auckland, Arts Festival

The Auckland Arts Festival runs from March 6 to 24. The programme showcases the Kronos Quartet and Chinese pipa virtuoso Wu Man; Britten's *War Requiem* with Voices New Zealand Chamber Choir; and Auckland Philharmonia composer-in-residence Jack Body's tribute to transgenderist Carmen Rupe. aucklandfestival.co.nz

7 Washington, Kennedy Center

The National Symphony Orchestra conducted by Christoph Eschenbach is joined by Anne Sofie von Otter and the University of Maryland Choir to perform Mozart's Requiem and a selection of Schubert Lieder from March 7 to 9. kennedy-center.org

9 Oxford, Town Hall

Nicholas Cleobury conducts the Oxford Bach Choir, Choristers of Christ Church Cathedral and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in Britten's *War Requiem* with soprano Elizabeth Llewellyn, tenor James Oxley and bass Giles Underwood, as part of the year-long 'Britten in Oxford' celebrations. britteninoxford.co.uk

13 London, Barbican

The Los Angeles Philharmonic and music director Gustavo Dudamel take up residency at the Barbican from March 13 to 17. Highlights include three concerts of 20th- and 21st-century music, masterclasses, an open rehearsal and an international symposium. barbican.org.uk



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Henriette Bonde-Hansen as Semiramide, with Barry Banks (far right) as Idreno

only Barry Banks was inside the idiom musically. That, and the company just wasn't tight enough under conductor Rani Calderon, who also adopted some atmosphere-flattening tempi.

Fear not, though. Forty-eight hours later, the same stage hosted a bold and brilliant production of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* which proved that innovative technical effects can have huge operatic power if they're controlled by the score – something that was once a Royal Danish Opera hallmark, and which doesn't cost a krone to nurture. **G**

14 Abu Dhabi, Emirates Palace Auditorium

The 10th Abu Dhabi Festival runs from March 14 to 26 with performances from Plácido Domingo, Ana María Martínez, Bryn Terfel, Yundi, Joshua Bell, Gilberto Gil, the Czech Philharmonic and the Mariinsky Ballet.

www.abudhabifestival.ae

16 London, Barnes Music Festival

The inaugural Barnes Music Festival takes place from March 16 to 24 taking as its theme 'Holst and the English Tradition' in celebration of the composer who lived and worked in the area. Artists appearing include Dame Felicity Lott, Graham Johnson and the Tippett Quartet.

barnesmusicfestival.com

29 St Endellion Easter Festival

The 40th St Endellion Easter Festival runs from March 29 to April 7. Highlights include: the Endellion String Quartet in Beethoven, Britten and Schubert; the world premiere of *Aurora lucis rutilat* by Matthew Martin; two performances of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with Mark Padmore as Gerontius; and 'Come and Sing!', a special event inviting the public to take part in a performance of Tallis's *Spem in Alium*.

endellionfestivals.org.uk

EVENT OF THE MONTH

March 26

Aix-en-Provence, Easter Festival

The inaugural Aix-en-Provence Easter Festival runs from March 26 to April 7 with performances from violinist and artistic director Renaud Capuçon, Semyon Bychkov with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Valery Gergiev and his Mariinsky Orchestra, the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester, Radu Lupu, Hélène Grimaud, James Ehnes, Leif Ove Andsnes and Gidon Kremer. The festival also includes a new commission by Jörg Widmann, a performance of Bach's *St John Passion* and a discussion with Alfred Brendel.

festivalpaques.com



Renaud Capuçon in Aix-en-Provence

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A photograph of a male conductor in a black tuxedo with a white shirt and bow tie, holding a baton in his right hand and gesturing with his left. He is surrounded by orchestra members, including violinists and a double bassist, all in formal attire. The background is dark, and the lighting is focused on the conductor.

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THIS MONTH some new separates from a familiar name from the past, Sansui; a slick little system from Onkyo; and I explore a way to bring order to chaotic network music libraries

Andrew Everard, audio editor

MARCH TEST DISCS



The new reading of Elgar's Cello Concerto by Alisa Weilerstein will bring out the best in a good system



If you're looking for a test of system agility, try Lars Vogt and Christian Tetzlaff's Ondine disc of Mozart violin sonatas

Even more ways to deliver music to your hi-fi

However you want to play your music, the options just keep on growing – from streamers to speakers

Having developed a staggering range of music streaming products, Naim has now turned its attention to those wanting to play their music direct from a computer, with the launch of the £1250 DAC-V1, the company's second digital-to-analogue converter and the first to feature an asynchronous USB input for direct connection to a computer. In a compact enclosure for desktop use, the DAC-V1 also has five S/PDIF digital inputs, a volume control and what's said to be a high-quality single-ended Class A headphone amplifier.

The DAC-V1 is compatible with formats up to 24-bit/384kHz via USB, or up to 24-bit/192kHz via its three electrical and two optical digital inputs, and offers a choice of fixed- or variable-level outputs, so it could be used as a simple DAC with an external preamplifier if required. To drive loudspeakers it can be partnered with the similarly sized NAP 100 power amplifier, also new at £650 and delivering 50W per channel.

An even simpler streaming solution, this time designed to get music from Bluetooth-equipped devices (such as smartphones and tablets) into a hi-fi system, is the uPlay Plus from QED, which sells for £100 and has both optical digital and analogue stereo outputs, so it can be connected to a standard amplifier, an AV receiver or even through a separate digital-to-analogue converter. Using the uPlay Plus, music can be sent from a phone or tablet over a range of around 10m and played through the home hi-fi system.

A different approach to wireless music is taken by Swedish company Audio Pro, whose products have appeared in these pages recently. Its £350 LV1 is a compact all-in-one stereo speaker, clad in a choice of leather finishes and using four 35W Class D



amplifiers. It connects to computers using a dedicated wireless transmitter, which can also be used with phones, tablets – in fact anything with an audio output.

At the other end of the audio scale are a couple of heavyweight integrated amplifiers with pretty hefty price-tags: Bryston's new 135Wpc B135 SST2, at £4900, and the £9900 T+A PA3000, capable of a 500Wpc continuous output and the first in a new High Voltage range from the German company.

Canada's Bryston says its amplifier is its best-ever integrated – it has seven line-level inputs and can accept optional digital and phono stages, while T+A says the secret of its new line is that the amplifier stages are driven at much higher voltages than those in rival designs, giving excellent dynamic ability and low distortion.

Finally, the latest generation of a famous line of speakers from Wharfedale, in the form of the Diamond 100 series. The Diamond range has been with us for more than 30 years, and the new models have redesigned drive units and self-damping cabinets bonded together from 'multi-grain faceted

board' combining chipboard and medium-density fibreboard, said to take any enclosure noise more than 35dB below the drive units' output. There are seven models, starting with the £230/pr Diamond 121 and going up to the £1000/pr Diamond 159 floorstanding speaker, and the line-up includes a choice of two centre speakers for surround-sound use. **6**

1 Naim For desktop audio enthusiasts: the DAC-V1 and NAP 100 power amp

2 QED Simplifies Bluetooth streaming with its £100 uPlay Plus

3 Audio Pro Streams from computers with the £350 LV1 wireless speaker

4 Bryston Says its B135 SST2 is its best-ever integrated amplifier

5 T+A Has launched its PA3000 High Voltage amplifier, delivering 500Wpc

6 Wharfedale Has a new generation of Diamond speakers, the Diamond 100



Quality vs Quantity

How different it is today where advances in technology have driven the desire for convenience and quantity at the considerable expense of quality. For many young people especially, the iPod, MP3 player or mobile telephone, connected to a pair of in-ear headphones, is their primary source of listening to music. The problem with this is that low-grade reproduced music is not going to deliver any significant beneficial outcomes for the listener. Probably the opposite will be true.

being about one-eleventh the size of a full resolution CD track (1411 kbps), so the quality is inevitably far inferior. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. Using an iPod while jogging does not really raise a quality issue but playing low-resolution tracks through, for example, an iPod docking station that feeds into a decent hi-fi system, is a disaster area.

It is very poor quality made louder and this even affects the type of music listened to. For example, most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file are a complete waste of time because there is so much information missing, all the complexities of the music are lost, and the recordings are reduced to just the essence of a tune.

Listening to Music – the Benefits

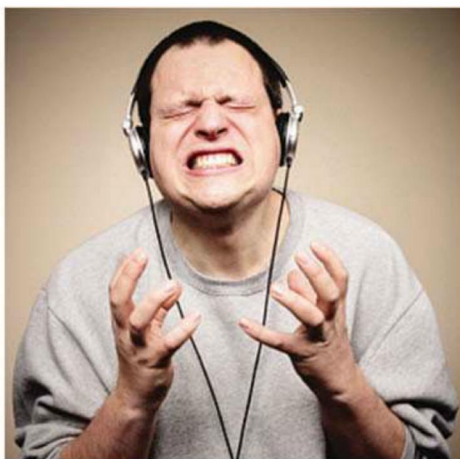
There have been many studies carried out over the years that have shown remarkable benefits for mankind through listening to music. It is an activity that is intrinsic to all cultures and is one of the few that involves using the whole brain. Listening to music is now often used for various therapeutic purposes because it is believed to improve memory and intelligence, improve physical development and coordination, reduce stress and blood pressure, and even reduce levels of pain.

However, music can also be irritating if it's too loud or distorted, or if it distracts from other activities we are involved in. Most of the studies have been carried out using a reasonably good quality of musical reproduction. Quite remarkably, many people today and probably a majority of teens and late teens, are listening to a considerably lower quality level of music than their peers back in the 1970's. Back then a basic hi-fi system, often consisting of just a turntable, amplifier and a pair of speakers, was a 'must have'. Students going off to university would make it a priority to set themselves up with a decent hi-fi system – and the quality was, in retrospect, surprisingly good.



Style over substance?

Have advances in technology driven the desire for convenience and quantity at the expense of quality?



Low-grade music in this context is the result of two main factors, a) the delivery system (the hardware) and b) the source material (the 'music'). Although the amplification section of the mobile device is a technological wonder, it's not hi-fi! Nor are in-ear headphones. They can't hold a candle to the stereo-typical system from the 1970's. As far as the source material is concerned, it's being over-generous to call it music if it's a typical MP3 or AAC (the iTunes default format) download. These are both highly compressed formats with the most popular download speed of 128 kbps

Future of Recorded Music

If convenience has trumped quality for many people, we must ask what the future prospects are of maintaining

high quality music recordings. Fortunately audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, or perhaps most accurately described, music lovers, continue to drive the demand for quality because there are some wonderful hi-end systems available and being sold today. Another important reason for hope within the mass-market is that there is no longer any over-riding reason for MP3 and AAC to have such a following. These formats were designed to overcome very slow download speeds pre-broadband and expensive memory capacity. These are not significant factors for most people now. Even iPods, if loaded with full resolution tracks, can deliver acceptable results through a good system. The trade-off is a smaller selection of stored music. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will become the norm as the wider public becomes aware of the tremendous quality benefit.



Audiophiles and Hi-Fi Connoisseurs

Hi-fi connoisseurs and audiophiles are very important to the music industry. By their nature, they are generally avid music lovers who enhance their enjoyment through listening to music at its very best quality level, which means playing great recordings through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without them, the main driver for quality would probably be removed from the music industry.



Specialist Dealers

Specialist hi-fi retailers also come into this category because it's their interest that has driven them into their particular business. These specialist retailers also perform another very important function because, without them, hi-fi manufacturers would have to rely on the internet and hi-fi magazine reviewers to try and assess the relative merits of different brands for potential customers – a notoriously unreliable decision making process. Specialist hi-fi retailers are constantly being offered new products for assessment and potential stocking and, as it is also their hobby as well as their livelihood, they are greatly interested in achieving the best performance and seeking out the most outstanding combinations. More than that though is their relationship with audiophiles and hi-fi connoisseurs for, if they are to stay in business, they must satisfy the most discerning customers in the industry. The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers (and the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest) are essential to each other.

Specialist dealers know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system

and how to get the best out of it by expert installation in the home. They also appreciate how exciting and involving music can be and how it can deliver a powerful emotional experience. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase by choosing a specialist dealer, it's probably a small one, but it's unquestionably worth the difference.

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

Listed below is our selection of THE BEST HI-FI DEALERS IN THE UK.

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E. Grinstead
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www.rayleigh-hifi.co.uk

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www.audiovenue.co.uk

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www.grahams.co.uk

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www.obrien-hifi.co.uk

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www.audience.org.uk

Exeter
GULLIFORD HI-FI
97 Sidwell Street.
t: 01392 491194
www.gulliford-hifi.co.uk

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● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Sansui WLD+201LX/SAP-201V

A new range from a familiar name shows definite promise



SPECIFICATION

SANSUI WLD+201LX

Type Network music player/radio tuner

Price £349

Bands FM/DAB/DAB+/internet radio

Network connectivity Ethernet, Wi-Fi (IEEE 802.11b/g)

File formats played FLAC and WAV up to 24-bit/48kHz, AAC/AAC+, MP3, WMA

Audio outputs Analogue stereo, optical/electrical digital

Other connections RS232, USB input

Accessories supplied Remote handset, Wi-Fi antenna

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43x8x28.3cm

SPECIFICATION

SANSUI SAP-201V

Type Stereo amplifier

Price £300

Inputs Moving magnet phono, four line-in on rear, one on front panel, optical and electrical digital

Outputs One pair speakers, tape out, headphones

Power output 40W per channel

Accessories supplied Remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43x8x28.3cm

sansui.co.uk

Distributed by **henleydesigns.co.uk**

For those of us who've been around a while, the Sansui name will be a familiar one – indeed, as I've mentioned before, my first 'proper' turntable was a Sansui SR-222, a MkII if I recall correctly, complete with gloss black plinth, belt drive and S-shaped tonearm with removable headshell.

But there was more to Sansui than just that turntable, which went on to go through four generations. Founded in Tokyo around the end of the Second World War as a transformer manufacturer, the company made high-quality audio components from

the 1960s – its tuners and amps from this time still coveted by collectors – through to the 1980s.

Of late Sansui has seen a rebirth: in the UK, a four-strong range of full-size hi-fi components sits alongside an all-in-one network-capable micro-system. The separates range comprises the £200 CDD-201V CD player, a DAB/DAB+/FM radio tuner, the £225 DR-201V, and the two components we have for review here: the £300 SAP-201V amplifier and the WLD+201LX, a £349 FM/DAB/DAB+ tuner/network music player/

internet radio. All the Sansui products come in a choice of black or silver, and look and feel solidly made and well-finished, down to the inverted input-labelling to the rear to simplify connections.

The Sansuis, despite their Japanese brand-name, are – in common with other cost-conscious hi-fi separates these days – made in China. That's no more than an economic reality these days: many manufacturers who don't outsource are in the process of doing so.

The WLD+201LX has inputs for both wired and wireless networking, a single radio

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The balance of the Sansui components makes them well suited to making the most of affordable speaker choices

MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE BX2

The Monitor Audio Bronze BX2s, at £250/pr, are good value for money, and on the end of the Sansuis will deliver excellent involvement



BOSTON ACOUSTICS A-25

A solid budget choice with a spacious, grown-up sound majoring on midrange clarity, the £200/pr Bostons are a fine partner for the Sansuis



antenna connection, a choice of electrical/optical digital or analogue outputs and a front-panel USB for the connection of memory devices containing music, while the centre of the front panel is dominated by a large, clear display. As well as the bundled remote control, there's an iOS app, Sansui Libretto, to control the WLD+201: it's free, but at the moment obviously only designed for iPhone and iPod Touch, looking a bit rough round the edges

'The WLD+201LX has one major advantage over most network players: it also has a rather good FM/DAB/DAB+ radio tuner built in'

when blown up on the screens of the iPad mini or third-generation iPad.

The 40W-per-channel SAP-201V amplifier, unusually at this price level, has not only analogue inputs but an onboard digital-to-analogue converter. Five analogue inputs are provided – moving magnet phono and four line-level – and there's an additional 3.5mm stereo line-in socket on the front panel, located beside the 6.3mm 'full size' headphone socket. The digital stage has a choice of optical and electrical input, and there's a single set of stereo speaker outputs. A 'credit card' remote control is provided, while a press of the main control knob, used to set volume levels, will also allow the user to adjust tone and balance. The network player's handset also controls the amplifier.

PERFORMANCE

Sansui has pitched its separates into a market sector that's not exactly underpopulated. As well as entry-level Marantz and Denon models, the 201 range faces competition from the likes of Cambridge Audio and Rotel, not to mention the lowest-priced Yamaha components. The WLD+201LX has one major advantage over the majority of network players around its price, though, in that it also incorporates that FM/DAB/DAB+ tuner (which is rather good, by the way).

Yet, like so many entry-level streaming music devices, it has the feel of a 'work in progress' about it. At the moment it's limited to a maximum of 24-bit/48kHz content – so the kind of high-resolution music slowly

becoming available is off limits. It doesn't play Apple Lossless content, and although that front-panel USB socket can play from 'thumb drive' devices, it isn't compatible with iPads, iPhones or even iPods. And while the Sansui will play MP3 content gaplessly, with only the slightest hesitation occasionally apparent, it leaves obvious track-gaps when playing FLAC, for example. Not a problem if you play music made up of individual songs but annoying if you're a fan of works whose tracks flow into each other. The Libretto app takes a while to leaf through big music libraries and occasionally requires the streamer to be rebooted in order to re-establish contact with the control device.

However, it sounds very respectable, even if by the standards of the very best network music players the Sansui is rather light in the bass, if tight and rhythmical, and a little splashy in the treble, meaning it can emphasise sibilants. That also tends to lay bare the deficiencies of low-bitrate audio, be it ripped, downloaded or streamed. Things get much better when you use higher-bitrate compressed audio, lossless or uncompressed content: by the time you're up to streaming CD-quality FLAC or WAV files, the performance is more than a match for a modern entry-level CD player.

The amplifier has a slightly warm sound, to the point where it can sound just a shade lazy with neutral sources, slightly blunting the leading edges of notes and smearing rhythms. Nevertheless, it's clean in the midband and treble, meaning it doesn't compound the slight forwardness of the player, but rather gives the overall sound a richer feel. Played with a variety of partnering components, the SAP-201V proved a capable and enjoyable amplifier, with the added appeal of that onboard digital-to-analogue conversion and a more than respectable phono stage. However, unless you really must have a DAC in your amplifier, it's not going to worry the Marantz PM6004, which has more poise and also greater dynamic 'punch'.

The Sansui components are a promising start for what is, if not a new brand to the UK, then at least a reinvented one: their quality of build and finish are impressive, and the sound and performance are almost there, to the point where these may be an interesting alternative to the established budget and midrange names. The new Sansui could once again become a brand to watch. **G**

DESIGN NOTES



Paul Mitchell

MD, Sansui Electronics UK

On Bach and Loussier, and the importance of lossless audio

The head of Sansui's UK operation is the son of an opera-singer mother and a piano-playing father, 'so music was ever present', and taught himself to play guitar and piano. He says: 'I was pretty good by 12 or 13, despite refusing lessons!'

An early musical influence was a grammar school teacher who played him the *Allegro* from Bach's Third *Brandenburg Concerto*, and then followed up with the same piece interpreted by Jacques Loussier.

Not surprisingly, the *Brandenburgs* remain a favourite, along with Strauss waltzes, and Mitchell counts among his most memorable musical experiences *Swan Lake* at the Royal Opera House as a teenager.

He's a great believer in the importance of lossless music – the Sansui streamer comes complete with PC software to rip music from CD in FLAC or WAV

– and says 'Sound quality has been crushed with the onset of iTunes and MP3.'

'Fortunately, lower prices for mass storage devices has meant that full-fidelity sound can be retained when burning CDs in formats like FLAC and uncompressed WAV files. The only need for a compressed copy is for transferring to a portable device.'

'We have tried to be the first audio brand to give the user a PC programme specifically designed for the purpose of making lossless files from original CDs in either FLAC or WAV format, whilst retaining all track information. I hope this speaks volumes for our commitment to audio fidelity in the digital age.'

'The only need for compressed audio is for transferring to a portable music-playing device'

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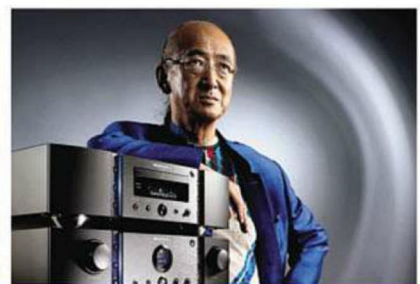
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**Boston Acoustics**

Boston Acoustics hired the skills of German speaker designer Karl Heinz Fink and the golden ears of Ken Ishiwata to create its latest range. The M series consists of three floor standing models M250, M340 and M350 and the stand-mount M25 (above).

They are all slim-line designs with cabinets that are distinguished by two-layer sandwich panels that work as constrained layers to damp resonance. The midrange and bass drivers are Boston's proprietary 4" polypropylene units.

The tweeter is a variation on the ring-radiator theme that's anchored in the center, where there is a slight dimple. Finish is a leatherette filling in a sandwich that can include either wood veneer or gloss black. These all new designs warrant an audition and are available from selected Music Matters stores.

**Marantz**

Well designed, performance driven and great value is the Marantz signature. The objective is simple - to engineer audio components and home entertainment systems which produce film soundtracks and music with realism in the home environment.

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Space-saving receiver at a handy price

Compact all-in-one streaming system proves to be a perfect small-room partner

With its network AV receivers, and its own music download service available in Japan, it's fair to say that Onkyo has a pretty good grip on music streaming in the home. Combine that with another of the company's historic strengths, high-quality compact systems designed to deliver maximum musical involvement while taking up minimal space, and you have the recipe for an intriguing little product, perfectly suited for second-room use or even, where living space is tight, as a main system.

Of course, Onkyo isn't alone in this sector of the market and it's probably fair to say that when most people consider a 'serious' micro-system, the first name to spring to mind is Denon, with its long-running DM series currently boasting the highly popular D-M39DAB. Then there's Denon stablemate Marantz, with its M-CR603 system bringing streaming capability to the party – not to mention TEAC, now part of a 'strategic alliance' with Onkyo, with its acclaimed Reference range. The latest of those, the Reference 501, has just been launched as a set of four high-end micro-components and hopefully will be the subject of a review here very soon.

However, this little Onkyo CR-N755 has one major advantage over all of those rivals: its combination of features and price. What we have here is a network-capable CD receiver, complete with internet radio,

'The well-equipped Onkyo CR-N755 system is, at £300, pretty amazing value for what is after all a "just add speakers" proposition'

access to streaming services such as Spotify and last.fm, a front-panel USB socket to which thumb-drives or iOS devices can be connected for playback, and optional control via free apps running on iPods, iPads, iPhones and Android phones and tablets. And it manages to do all that for £300.

That's pretty amazing value already as a 'just add speakers' proposition; combine the CR-N755 with Onkyo's optional speakers to create the £450 CS-N755, or spend £150 or so on some third-party speakers, and you could have a highly capable system. However, things get even better when you look at actually buying the Onkyo: with minimal

ONKYO CR-N755 NETWORK-CONNECTED CD RECEIVER

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Other facilities Tone/balance controls,

Phase Matching Bass, sleep timer

Accessories supplied Remote control handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 21.5x11.9x33.1cm

onkyo.co.uk



Googleage you can find it with a handy £50 or so off, making the CR-N755 just the right side of £250 and the system complete with speakers under £400.

Highly affordable the Onkyo may be but it feels anything but cheap: its build is solid, fit and finish are impeccable and the controls work with smoothness and precision. True, there's no DAB reception here – instead you get FM RDS and AM, plus of course internet radio using the vTuner platform – but otherwise everything is in place. The amplifier delivers 2x22W (using the same technology you'll find in the company's heavyweight AV receivers); and, while the Apple AirPlay connectivity you'll find in some other systems of this kind is missing, you can connect an optional Onkyo Bluetooth unit to enable music to be sent wirelessly from smartphones, tablets and suitable computers.

PERFORMANCE

Start using the Onkyo and it quickly becomes apparent just how flexible this system is: it has an Ethernet port to connect to a home network, and via this can stream not just radio and streaming services but an exemplary range of music formats from local storage, including FLAC, Apple Lossless and even DSD. The last is interesting – the system isn't capable of playing Super Audio CDs but it can play the SACD-quality DSD files being made available through some download sources (such as Onkyo's own).

More conventionally, it's also worth noting that the CR-N755 has a second USB port on the rear panel, along with two sets of analogue audio inputs and optical and electrical digital

socketry, while below the main speaker outputs there's also a single socket to feed an active subwoofer, should you wish to use one. So it's not short on either flexibility or connectivity, and the even better news is that the Onkyo sounds pretty impressive, too. It's not the system I'd choose to fill huge rooms or drive really tricky speaker loads but it has impressive clarity and poise, and above all makes music both involving and enjoyable.

Yes, the treble is ever so slightly smooth, robbing really atmospheric recordings of just the last bit of ambience, but this characteristic is infinitely preferable to an over-enthusiastic, spitty top-end, which would be a recipe for listening fatigue. As it is, the Onkyo is more than capable with a range of music from accompanied voice to orchestral works – provided you don't push it too hard – and its generous, powerful balance is doubly remarkable when one considers the small housing from which it emanates.

With equally convincing performance from streamed content, broadcast or internet radio or CD, plus a huge range of listening options on tap, this is just about the perfect compact system right now. That it also sells for a bargain price makes it just about a 'must have'. **G**



HOW TO TEST...

The Onkyo system brings out the warmth and sense of occasion in a recording: try it with this recent reissue of Tennstedt conducting the LPO in Brahms's First and Third Symphonies and that ability will be to the fore.

● ESSAY

'I've been looking for a way to control my music library – this could be it..'

Having an extensive music collection at your fingertips is convenient – but when tagging gets out of hand, chaos can ensue. **Andrew Everard** has been trying out a solution

Once you have your music collection ripped and stored on a home server, it's hard to imagine how you lived without it: an entire music library at your fingertips. Finding a favourite work or track no longer involves hunting through racks and stacks of CDs – time-consuming, however well-arranged they may be – but can be achieved with a few taps of a finger on a smartphone or tablet screen. Another tap and the music plays through the audio system.

However, as your music libraries grow, so does the potential for problems: albums either ripped or downloaded can seem invisible to your network music players, tracks can default to playing in alphabetical order rather than by number, compilation albums can appear as a whole series of micro-albums divided up by artist, and album artwork can be wrong or simply non-existent.

Putting that right can be time-consuming: it's not unknown for me to have wasted an entire weekend afternoon ploughing through folders of files and typing in endless details. When quite a lot of your listening is to pre-releases, many of which have long track titles, upwards of 30 tracks per disc and of course no hint of recognition from any of the familiar databases, things can be doubly annoying.

Usually either XLD or even iTunes will come up with something with some coaxing

'My music library is better organised, the number of "unfound" albums reduced. Blissful rather than stressful'

but sometimes – and it's usually with the multi-disc opera sets! – there's no alternative to typing in track names and details. What's more, not all (legally) downloaded music is equal when it comes to tagging: some sites do it well, others have their own ideas, including catalogue numbers in track titles, or tagging composers as artists, or even not including any information at all. To say the least, it's a tad frustrating.

All of which explains how I currently have a music storage system comprising getting on for 50,000 tracks – or 'songs', as iTunes

would still have it (were I to use it) – and some severe need for more time spent sorting out tagging, finding artwork and the like. Yes, you can live without an album sleeve picture staring at you, but having it just makes things a little neater.

So it was with interest that I stumbled across Bliss, a software package claiming to solve all those artwork and metadata tagging problems. Actually, my first introduction was via the free downloadable ebook published by Bliss developer Dan Gravell, which gives a brief and sensible overview. You can download a PDF copy from blisshq.com/music-library-management-ebook.html or choose ePub or Kindle versions.

Having read and digested that – and if you're prepared to put in the work yourself, that may be all you need – I downloaded the free trial version of Bliss from blisshq.com. (It comes in a variety of platform-specific versions: for Windows XP/Vista/7, Mac OS X, Linux and Vortexbox.) The way this works is that you get a free download, limited to 100 fixes – corrections to the database, such as the addition of cover art – and then you can buy additional fixes as and when you need them: 1000 fixes will cost you £10; unlimited fixes can be had for £30.

In use, Bliss can be loaded on the device where your music is hosted, where it will work in the background, being accessed remotely via a web interface. Various third-party solutions have been developed to install it on some popular servers – Synology and ReadyNAS devices, for example – but as yet there isn't a direct QPKG version for the QNAP server I'm using, so I had to resort to using the software on my MacBook and 'pointing it' at the NAS. This is a simple matter of browsing for the music store, and then off you go.

And how does it work? Exceptionally well. True, it took a day or so to chug through the stack of music I have on the NAS, and until I got into the swing of the set-up was throwing up all sorts of error messages, but once I got the hang of the settings – basically just setting it to update everything automatically! – it cleaned up my library in pretty short order. Gravell explains that



The Bliss package makes sense of tags and artwork, and does so at a sensible price

things would happen even faster were I to have the Bliss software on the same device as my music library.

There's plenty of flexibility if you want to tinker: as seen above, you can specify sizes for album art, for example, decide whether or not to embed art in the music files themselves, and adjust the format in which music files are labelled, stored and tagged. The upshot of all of which is that my music library is now definitely much better organised, and the number of random 'unfound' albums is hugely reduced. Blissful rather than stressful, in fact.

It certainly makes using the library even more convenient, meaning this software is well worth exploring if you have a growing amount of music on a server. Apart from anything else, it makes your collection look better, saves a lot of manual retagging and might even free up some of those evenings and afternoons for listening to the music, rather than fretting over it. And, after all, it's free to try... **G**

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Fiona Shaw

The actress and opera director on pushing young singers to their physical limits, meeting Henze (and narrowly avoiding his wrath) and being brought up in the 19th century...

My mother was an obsessive opera lover who would play the piano and sing every night – and still does. She's 86, she's amazing, and her voice hasn't become an old lady's voice at all! I played the cello, but instead of joining the youth orchestra, I went to acting classes instead. I performed a lot. I was brought up in the 19th century in that my mother used to have musical evenings. We had a very big drawing room and people would come and play, so performing in the house was fundamental to my childhood and possibly to my professional life.

I used to go to the Proms although I didn't particularly pursue music – but my theatre friends began to be interested in music. Deborah Warner's first opera was *Wozzeck*, which I went to see a few times, and began to see that this form of theatre and music was actually very exciting. The thing we do in theatre is cut the air with 'moments', and of course *Wozzeck* does that a lot, where the music and the silence are playing a very high-definition game with each other. That's really what we're doing with Shakespeare or a classical work, we're trying to make the thing cut right through the air so that the audience not only hear it but feel it.

My other great friend is Phyllida Lloyd – she directed the *Dialogues of the Carmelites* and I found that devastating. Phyllida has this unparalleled gift at playfulness mixed with serious profound thinking, and Deborah has this austere sandblasting ability to clear everything away apart from the essence of the thing. One is a Roundhead and one is a Cavalier I think.

I worked a bit at the ENO Young Singers Programme, and I had great fun asking people to do almost impossible things – jumping off walls, or tumbling, or climbing whilst singing, and what was surprising was that sometimes they were better when they did something very strenuous. For all the huge gymnastic rigour and particularity of the training in classical singing, the thing I'm trying to do is find the personality of the singer, that added 'something' that is not just their voice, but themselves. I get excited when the singer is involved with what they're singing, when a choices they make is something that they emotionally recognise themselves.

When I did my first opera, *Riders to the Sea*, Pat Bardon was just delighted to be given the opportunity to play every Irish mother that she had ever witnessed or liked or disliked, and so her performance was infused with a sort of personal ownership that was beyond my direction. It set the bar very high in the room so that the others began to see this personal investment – it was very moving.

When I started to work on *Elegy for Young Lovers* I was terrified of it, I couldn't understand it all. I thought, 'I can probably track it through the Auden, I'll just stick to the text and see if that is my way in'. The music was quite difficult at the beginning – of course



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I'm directing this for Glyndebourne and I find it utterly mysterious – its disunities are really quite challenging.

it became like mother's milk to me later. I went to see Hans Werner Henze in Italy. He was just charming, this little mole of a man who climbed up from his wing-back chair. We sat down and had a marvellous conversation and he told me all about his life, and at the end of that day I felt I must put the opera on for him. Oddly your motivation is not particularly rational. He came to see it and we had cut one section of it because I felt it was too long – and he was furious! We did three-and-a-half hours of his opera and he noticed the 20 bars I had cut! But he was delighted by it overall, and wrote afterwards that it was his favourite version of it. I was very honoured.

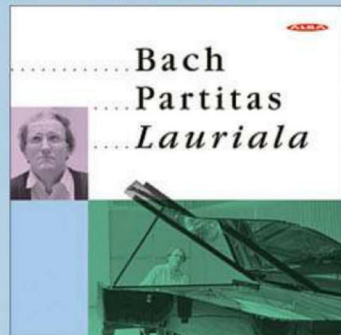
In some ways what I'm doing in the theatre myself is probably quite near opera, in that it's about the elevation of thought and speech to something that can become poetical. We're not trying to do realism in the theatre, we're not trying to keep the speech domestic – it may be the language that people use domestically, but it must always have an elevated poetical resonance in the theatre. You hold the thought and allow air through it – which is what the notes in opera are doing.

There is an audience out there whose mental architecture in relation to going to the theatre at all is probably proscribed by the super-realism of film and the hyper-ordinariness of television. We must just allow them the threads which are the human dimension, to encourage them to get on to the surfboard of opera – because once you're surfing on it I don't think you want to come back. **G** Fiona Shaw stars in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* on March 9; the screening is part of the BBC SO's *Total Immersion: New from the North* day at the Barbican



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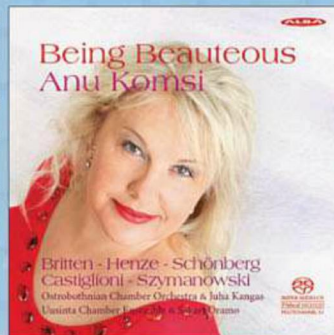
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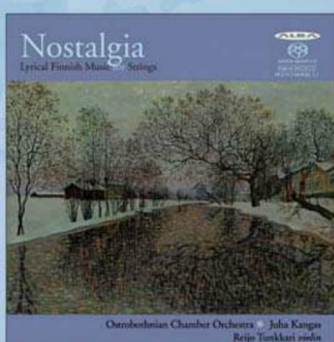
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